COMMUNICATION IN CROSS CULTURAL MARRIAGE

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I dedicate this work to the greatest treasure God has given me in this life, my family.  I am so

grateful to my dear husband, Yousef, for his love, support, and constancy over the length of my

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with gratitude to God.

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# ABSTRACT

While a successful marital relationship involves various aspects, communication is the key component for a successful marriage. A lack of strong communication skills and an immature manner of relating to others lead to stress and increase struggles and conflicts between spouses. While most couples experience difficulties in their marriage, cross-cultural marriages face even more challenges that originate from their background and cultural differences. When dysfunctional communication is added to such a marriage, conflict and dissatisfaction can rule the relationship, and divorce may threaten it. However, utilizing specific counseling approaches and integrating them with a biblical counseling approach, along with an understanding of attachment styles, family structure and spirituality, help the couples of cross-cultural marriages to improve their communication skills, to understand their spouses' feelings and needs, and to work through their differences in effective ways. This counseling process developed in therapy sessions would result in strengthening cross-cultural marriages and empowering the relationships within the family.

**CHAPTER 1**

**THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO COUNSELING**

**Introduction**

Many studies emphasize the role of communication and its effects on marital satisfaction. They consider effective communication as an important component in facing daily struggles and conflicts in marriage. The findings of these studies point out that unclear communication, and lack of healthy communication skills among family members, increase the tension in the family and cause conflicts and relational problems (Guttman, 1995; Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Some research reports that these problems can be found more in cross-cultural marriages, inasmuch as cross-cultural marriages have more stress, dysfunction, and conflict (Frame, 2004; Tili & Barker, 2015).

Indeed, cross-cultural marriages face challenges and differences in many issues such as values, gender, money, sexuality, religion, social class, and language (Frame, 2004), which are based on assumptions, convictions, and expectations (Romano, 1997). All these factors can cause misunderstanding and negative reactions, and increase conflict and feelings of distance from each other (Romano, 1997). However, when communication is effective, while coping with their differences, couples in cross-cultural marriages have an opportunity for personal growth and self-understanding (Tili & Barker, 2015).

The question of this thesis is how would clear and healthy communication help resolve conflict and prevent divorce in a cross-cultural marriage? It will investigate and apply how changing the communication style, learning new skills of communication, and

expressing negative feelings in a respectful way can help settle interpersonal issues and surmount challenges in cross-cultural marriages in a way that brings growth to the family members and strengthens their relationships.  This study will also consider vital components of the dynamics in the couple's relationship such as personality issues, attachment style, problem-solving skills, family-of-origin system, family structure, and spirituality.

## Definition of the Family

The source of the word family comes from the Latin word *familia*, which means "family servants, domestics collectively, the servants in a household" (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2015).   According to the United Nations (1948), "the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State."   Family definitions have changed as society changes.  A traditional definition of family is "the smallest, organized, durable network of kin and non-kin who interact daily, providing domestic needs of children and assuring their survival" (Stack, 1996, p. 31).

Patterson (1996) defines family in psychological terms.  He points out that:

> Most uses of the word family in research indicate that it was often defined as 'spouse and children' or 'kin in the household.'  Thus 'family' as defined in economics, sociology, and psychology often was a combination of the notions of household and kin… An exception to this standard definition of family is in clinical and counseling psychology, where family includes one's family of origin (parents and siblings) in addition to spouse and children (p. 818).

However, Rodney Clapp brings another perspective to the family when he claims that "family defines us, leaving its imprint on every aspect of our character. It is the earliest and most indelible 'world' we know…it is the ground we stand on" (Clapp, 1993, pp. 28-29).

Family structure had changed. Today a variety of family units exist: single-parent families, children raised by grandparents, homosexual parents raising adopted children, and so on. It is common now to have a different view of what makes a family. This thesis will emphasize counseling intervention within a Christian setting of the family. Understanding what makes a family is fundamental for establishing a family therapy. For Christian family counselors, it is essential to understand the Biblical view of the family.

## A Biblical View of the Family

Marriage and family are the basic building-block relationships initiated by God. A more in-depth theological perspective on marriage and family will be discussed in chapter two, but a brief definition will be presented here. Marriage is "the mutual commitment by faith of two individuals to lifelong sharing of their lives" (Mathews & Hubbard, 2004, p. 33), which was designed as part of God's eternal purpose for humans to be in relationship with him and with each other (Mathews & Hubbard, 2004).

The Bible calls for the husband-wife relationship to be one of mutual submission and respect "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." (Eph. 5:21 NIV), mutual fulfillment in the sexual relationship (1 Cor. 7:3-4), and mutual fidelity in a monogamous relationship (Exo. 20:14, Heb. 13:4). Moreover, biblical marriage makes the couple partners in growth, since marriage is transformational (Pro. 27:17). The wife must love

her husband (Tit. 2:3- 5), submit to his leadership (Eph. 5:22-24, 1 Pet. 3:1-2), and respect him (Eph. 5:33). The husband must love his wife (Eph. 5:25, 28, 33), be committed to her (Eph. 5:31), and be considerate of her (1 Pet. 3:7). Marriage is to be a light to the world and a reflection of God's love.

The Bible teaches that family is of a divine origin and purpose. It is divine because it was initiated by God (Gen. 2:21-22), and reflects his own image (Gen. 1:26-27). Human beings were created for a divine purpose. They were created with the need for companionship and relationship with each other (Gen. 2:18). They were called to reproduce, to subdue the earth and rule the other creatures, "God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Gen. 1: 28 NIV).

Moreover, the Bible gives divine structures and principles for the relationships of the family members. The Bible distinguishes between the sub-systems of husband-wife, and parents-children, because the tasks in each sub-system are different. God's intention for the relationship between parents and children is that parents teach their children (Deut. 6:6-7), train them (Pro. 22:6), discipline them with love (Ephe. 6:4), and be an example for them (2 Chro. 26:3-4, 2 Tim. 1:5). Children are to honor their parents (Exo.s 20:12), obey them (Eph. 6:1), learn from and imitate them (Pro. 1:8), and provide for them if they are in need (1 Tim. 5:4). Since the interference of sin, marriage and family went far away from God's design. There is an obvious gap between marriage and family as it was created to be and what it is in the context of today's culture.

**The Family in Today's Culture**

Many families today are experiencing pain and trouble. Divorce rate is growing (Hawkins & Fackrell, 2009). Single parent families are common, (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012) leaving all the struggle and care to meet the household's needs to one parent. The original family design is broken; thus, the family's purpose is affected as well.

When the family is in crisis, they try to seek solutions and solve problems in ways that worked for them in the past. If these ways do not work, their tension will increase. In response, they will attempt to redefine the problem, and if they are not able to solve the problem, they will experience disruption and disintegration (Wynn, 1991). It is in this circumstance that therapy takes place.

**Family Therapy**

The word therapy is derived from the Greek word "*therapeia,*" which means "service," and in Latin it means "to serve" (Wynn, 1991). This reminds us that the main goal of family therapy is to serve the family and be there for them when needed.

Families come to therapy with confused emotions, stress, and maybe a sense of shame and failure. Marriage and family therapy helps families or individuals within a family to understand and improve the way family members interact with each other and resolve conflicts together. It helps troubled families to achieve desired changes by helping them to work out their difficulties and fix the broken relationships. Family therapy works to strengthen the family and keep its unity. One way to do that is to strengthen the marriage and give the couple tools to work through conflicts and hardship. Counseling is designed to help people in their needs, struggles and difficulties.

## Christian Counseling

Christian counseling is centered on Christ, and based on the teachings of the Bible (Mack, 1998).  The Bible is a book that reveals God to human beings.   Humans can learn a lot about themselves from the Bible.  They can learn the truth about humanity from the perspective of their creator.  Therefore, the Bible is the first reference Christian counselors can search to understand human psychology.

### The Christian Therapist

Christian therapists (The term, *therapy*, is used interchangeably with *counseling* in this thesis) are the agents of the ministry of restoration.  They are ambassadors and bridge builders of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5: 20).  Counselors are caregivers, who are characterized by a personality that radiates "sincerity, understanding, compassion, and the ability to confront in a genuine and constructive manner" (Collins, 2007, p. 63). Therapists bring to therapy their own emotions, skills, concerns, and different perspectives.  As Wynn (1991) puts it: "It will be your caring, your openness, your personal balance, and your experience in mediating redemptive possibilities that make the major difference" (p.106).

In addition, therapists are "skilled in techniques that help counselors move toward specific goals" (Collins, 2007, p. 63).  They are called to do the work that Jesus did on earth: Jesus came to give an abundant and better life (John 10:10), and to meet our deepest needs and heal the wounds (Act. 10:38). Christian counselors are the soul physicians (Kellmen, 2007).  They are called to heal wounds and bring life (Kellmen, 2005).

Effective counselors are to be patient, good listeners, compassionate, non-judgmental, research-oriented, empathic, discrete, encouraging, self-aware, and authentic (Collins, 2007). Moreover, as Collins (2007) suggests, counselors need to have some basic goals in counseling. The first task is to help relieve symptoms such as anxiety, inner pain, stress, and tension, by listening, showing compassion, and offering hope. The second goal is to help the counselee gain self-understanding, thus helping them become aware of their contribution to the situation. It is also important for the counselee to see their problem within the bigger context of the world. A third goal is to teach the counselee effective skills and behaviors, such as new communication skills. A fourth goal is conflict resolution and reconciliation. Fifth, a counselor should provide support and understanding so the counselee can maintain changes and be encouraged in the face of challenges. Sixth, the counselor should encourage spiritual growth and wholeness, because there is a spiritual dimension in human problems. Christian counselors lead their counselees to deal with spiritual struggles, and to find meaningful beliefs and values. Finally, Christian counselors help their clients in self-development, which is the ability to actualize one's potential and abilities (Collins, 2007).

Therapists can use many different approaches they feel will help achieve the goal. However, an integrative approach can be best. The integrative approach is when the counselor brings different elements from the various therapy approaches for treating a client.

**Therapy Approaches for Couple and Family Therapy**

There are many couple and family therapy approaches available. I prefer to work with the following approaches.

**Integrating a Biblical Therapy**

Some Christians believe that the Bible holds all truth we need, therefore, there is no need for psychology (Adams, 1979). Nevertheless, the Bible does not contain all truth. Moreover, the Lord revealed his truth through nature and humans (Psalm 19), and it is still considered as God's truth. As St. Augustine (2012, II.18.28) proclaimed, "let every good and true Christian understand that wherever truth may be found, it belongs to his Master." Psychology can increase our insight and sharpen our skills and effectiveness in counseling (Crabb, 1977). However, as we explore and engage with the world outside the church, outside the Bible, we need the Holy Spirit, the church, and the framework of the Bible that shapes our minds (as we interpret the world) to understand the "truth in nature" correctly.

Crabb proposed a Christian counseling model. For him, to be an effective counselor, one needs to understand what people need to live effectively. According to Crabb (1977), people have one basic personal need. That need is "a sense of personal worth, an acceptance of oneself as a whole, real person" (p. 61). This need has two important elements: security and significance. Significance refers to the need for purpose, importance, adequacy for a job, meaningfulness, and impact. Security refers to unconditional and consistently expressed love, and permanent acceptance (Crabb, 1977).

A Christian counselor's goal is to move an individual, marriage, or family towards that which God intended for it from the beginning: to be in a close relationship with Christ. Therefore, the therapist's task is to bring the individual and the family into reconciliation with God and with each other. The goal is for them to depend on God alone to make them secure and significant. This can be obtained by renewing the mind.

As Crabb puts it, "Christians are of course interested in rational, reasonable behavior, but only on the foundation of right thinking. Right behavior springing from right thinking yields a joyful, natural, desired obedience to the God who has made us whole persons, both significant and secure" (Crabb, 1977, p. 139).

**Systems Approach in Family Therapy**

Wynn (1991) defines family therapy as "the practice of treating a family in a collective unit, taking into account the system through which the family members interact" (p. viii). A systems approach sees individuals in relation to others and their context (Becvar & Becvar, 1996). It considers every family as a system: any change with one member will affect the total system (Wynn, 1991). To understand the individual, it is vital to understand the whole system and the interaction within its members, since the "whole is always greater than the sum of its parts" (Nichols, 2010, p. 91).

As Becvar & Becvar (1996) put it, "Systems theory directs our attention away from the individual and individual problem in isolation and toward relationships and relationship issues between individuals" (p. 8). In systems theory, there is no linear causality, the responsibility is shared between the individuals in the relationship. However, there is reciprocal causality, as well as holistic perspective. The focus is not on the cause; therefore, we are not asking "why" something is happening. Instead we are looking for "what" is going on. We are looking at the dynamics, patterns, and roles. We focus on the context and the process, which gives meaning to the events. We examine the here-and-now interaction rather than looking to the past and to history. Systems theory sees every member in the family as proactive subjects and objects, which act in a world and have choices (Becvar & Becvar, 1996).

A systems approach has six main concepts: differentiation of self, triangles, nuclear family, emotional process, family projection process, multigenerational transmission, and sibling position (Bowen, 1976). Differentiation from the family of origin is an important concept in a systems approach. Differentiation aids in the ability to think, reflect, and not to respond automatically in response to anxiety. Differentiated people can balance thinking and feeling. Undifferentiated people are reactive to other people, and in the face of anxiety they find it difficult to find their own autonomy (Nichols, 2010).

Triangulation is the situation that occurs when there is tension and anxiety between two people in a family that lack differentiation. One or both may form a triangulation with a third person in the family. By pulling in a third party, the couple establishes supportive emotional relationships that help them to manage their anxiety, avoid conflict, minimize responsibility, or pit one person against the other. Triangulating is dysfunctional when it is cross-generational. An example is when the couple involves the children. Triangulation is also dysfunctional when the third party distracts the couple from resolving their tension (Bowen, 1978). Triangulation as a behavior pattern can be learned across generations as a coping strategy. In addition, roles and themes in triangulation can be passed on cross-generationally. Parents transmit their anxiety and their level of differentiation to children, and it transmits from one generation to the next. This is known as the family projection process (Bowen, 1978, 1976).

The ideal model family for the systems approach is when "family members are differentiated, anxiety is low, and partners are in good emotional contact with their own families" (Nichols, 2010, p. 119). People who have good differentiation in their

relationships are more resilient, flexible, and sustained.  People who are undifferentiated

tend to develop unhealthy symptoms and emotional fusion.  As Nichols describes it,

emotional fusion is the result of anxious attachment (Nichols, 2010).

Systems approach helps people learn about their relationships, take responsibility

for their own behavior, and understand their roles in the conflict.  Attention is paid to

process and structure. Relational interactions are measured, displayed in patterns such as

triangles and others, by using the genogram as a tool of assessment.  The genogram maps

the family system and collects information about family members.  This information

includes the original families, their history, geographic location, behavioral patterns,

health issues, deaths, marriages, divorces, events, and types of interactions between them

over at least three generations (McGoldrick, Gerson, & Petry, 2008).   The genogram

helps the therapist to see the present issues in the light of its patterns (McGoldrick,

Gerson, Petry, 2008).

**Structural Approach**

The structural approach views family members in their social and relational

context, and focuses on the family interaction and communication. Every family has a

structure, which is influenced by cultural beliefs.  The therapist wants to determine the

structure and the ways it is problematic to the family.   According to Minuchin (1974),

"Family structure is the invisible set of functional demands that organizes the ways in

which family members interact" (p. 51).  The family is a system that includes

subsystems.  Minuchin (1974) states:

> Individuals are subsystems within a family.  Dyads such as husband-wife
>
> or mother-child can be subsystems. Subsystems can be formed by

generation, by sex, by interest, or by function. Each individual belongs to different subsystems, where he or she has different levels of power and where he or she learns to differentiated skills (p. 82).

The main concepts in this approach are rules, roles, coalitions, triangulation of conflict, subsystems and boundaries, organization, feedback, stability, and change (Vetere, 2001).

A normal family is not the one that has no problems, but one that has a functional structure for dealing with them. Boundaries define who are the members of each subsystem, and the way they function and interact. Each subsystem has its own tasks and demands of its members (Vetere, 2001). The couple in a normal family is not fused with their family of origin. When children are born, the structure of the family forms subsystems of the couple and the children (Nichols, 2010). In some families, the structure is well defined and organized; there are clear boundaries between the subsystem, and each subsystem functions within these boundaries. In other families, the structure and its organization is not clear (Gladding, 2007).

When boundaries are diffused, the family is enmeshed. The members are dependent on each other. One example is that the parents may interfere in the subsystem of children in a way that will affect their development negatively. When the boundaries are rigid, the family is disengaged. In this case, children may not get the right guidance, or there may be power struggles. In both types of families, conflicts are not resolved appropriately. The disengaged family avoids engaging in conflict, while the enmeshed family denies differences to avoid conflicts. In some families, there are cross-

generational coalitions, which resemble triangulation in the systems approach (Nichols, 2010).

In therapy, the therapist joins the family system, elicits family narratives, and expands cultural stories in order to understand the rules that govern the family's functioning (Nichols, 2010).  Using enactment is a way the therapist sees patterns in the family, this helps the counselor to map the relationships within the system and subsystems (Nichols, 2010). The therapist highlights and modifies healthy interactions, disrupts dysfunctional relationships in the family, and encourages a change towards healthier patterns (Nichols, 2010).   According to Friesen (1995), the goals of therapy are to create an effective hierarchical structure, to help families to distinguish between the subsystems functions, and to ensure the parents' roles are complementary to each other. If the family is disengaged, the goal is to increase interactions and nurture.  In an enmeshed family, the goal is to increase the differentiation.

**Cognitive-Behavioral Couple Therapy**

In the cognitive model, dysfunctional thinking affects mood and behavior. When people learn to change their thoughts, there will be improvement in their emotions and behaviors (Beck, 2011).  The cognitive approach works on the basic beliefs of people about "themselves, their world, and other people" (Beck, 2011, p. 3), and tries to change their perspective.

The behavioral approach sees the individual as a "bundle of behavior patterns, reflexes, perceptions and impressions" (Jones & Butman, 1991, p. 148).  For this approach, all behaviors are explained by the processes of classical and operant learning. Such learning is affected by the consequences of the behavior, namely, reinforcements or

punishments.  Negative behavior can be a result of learning inappropriate behaviors,

failure to learn proper skills, or responding to the wrong environmental contingencies, or

all of these (Jones & Butman, 1991).

For Cognitive- Behavioral Couple therapy (CBCT), a normal family is one in

which "giving and getting are balanced…here is a high ratio of benefits to costs"

(Nichols, 2010, p. 246).   Baucom, Epstein, LaTaillade, & Kirby (2008) describe a

healthy couple relationship as one that:

> Contributes to the growth, development, wellbeing, and needs fulfilment
>
> of each partner.  A healthy relationship fosters partners' psychological
>
> growth and maturity, development and advancement of each other's career
>
> aspirations, and promotion of the physical health and well-being of each
>
> individual.  The relationship should serve as a source of support to
>
> individual partners during difficult and stressful times… Both partners are
>
> able to make decisions and resolve problems effectively, develop
>
> closeness and intimacy, communicate constructively, engage in mutually
>
> rewarding and pleasurable activities, reciprocate the other's positive
>
> behavior, and perceive each other in positive ways … and able to adapt
>
> over time to both normative and non-normative events or stressors (p. 36).

Distressed relationships, poor communication, and deficient problem-solving

skills characterize distressed families.  These families will have repeated negative

exchanges, and will develop negative thoughts and emotions towards each other.

Different wants and needs of the individual may lead to relationship distress, and they

will use maladaptive strategies in response to their unmet needs (Baucom, Epstein, LaTaillade, & Kirby, 2008).

The goals of cognitive behavior therapy are to change ineffective behavior patterns to healthy ones, to increase satisfaction by increasing positive behaviors, and to teach "communication, problem solving, and negotiation skills" (Nichols, 2010, p. 249). In addition, therapy helps couples to adjust their thoughts about each other by examining these thoughts and highlighting how "illogical beliefs and distortions serve as the foundation for their emotional distress" (Dattilio, 2001, p. 7).

**Hope-Focused Couple Therapy**

Hope-focused couple therapy is a Christian approach based on cognitive behavioral therapy that aims to help couples in their conflicted relationships. It focuses on fostering hope in the couple using Biblical principles and scriptures, and relying on the help of the Holy Spirit. It integrates faith and practice (Worthington, 1999).

In hope-focused therapy the primary cause of marital conflict is understood to be a loss of love. When a spouse does not feel loved, "they may feel sad, angry, jealous, depressed, resentful, or bitter" (Worthington, 1999, p. 46). They may deal with these feelings "in the flesh" (1 Cor. 3:3); that is, they may seek revenge, attack their spouse, become self-centered, withdraw from the marriage, and finally blame their spouse, God and sometimes themselves. A secondary cause for marital conflict is one or both of the couple losing faith and thus, reducing their work on the marriage. Losing faith is "when people devalue each other and fail to value each other, the ratio of positive to negative interactions between the partners decreases" (Worthington, 1999, p. 47). When partners

lose love and faith, they stop working on their relationship, which will worsen the relationship (Worthington, 1999).

The goal of intervention is strengthening marriage and preventing divorce. The focus is on hope as the power that can bring change into a marriage. Hope is defined by three concepts: hope as "willpower", hope as "waypower", and hope as "waitpower" for God to change the situation. Hope involves "a motivation to endure when we cannot change circumstances. Hope involves a vision of a way through suffering: willpower and waypower to endure, with the help of the Triune God" (Worthington, 1999, p. 31).

The strategy of this therapy is "faith expressing itself through love" (Gal. 5:6 NIV). Love is defined as being willing to value the partner; faith is believing that things hoped for will come about; and work is the energetic effort to make the marriage work. The intervention includes homework assignments, assessment tools, and confrontations through building faith, work, and love. It encourages the couple to listen, to observe one's effects on the spouse, to value the partner, and to evaluate the interests of one another without condemnation. The intervention helps the couple to practice ways to resolve conflict by teaching the couple conflict resolution skills and promoting forgiveness and reconciliation. The intervention makes change tangible. Change needs to be sensed by the partner. Talk alone is not enough; action involving physical results is necessary.

The therapist assesses nine areas: central beliefs and values, core vision, confession and forgiveness, communication, conflict resolution, cognition, closeness, complicating problems, and commitment. After this evaluation, the therapist decides which of these areas needs to be addressed in therapy (Worthington, 1999).

**Solution Focused Therapy (SFT)**

Solution Focused therapy (SFT) is a brief therapy that focuses on solutions, rather than problems, and helps clients to achieve the outcomes they wish to have. It focuses on the here-and-now and has specific goals. The therapist is active and influential in the therapy process (O'Conell, 2005). In SFT, normal families "have flexible structures, clear boundaries, and well-organized hierarchies, and they use positive reinforcement control, offer secure attachment, and provide mutual need satisfaction" (Nichols, 2010, p. 321).

This approach insists that people need change in their perspective to release their potential. A focus of this approach is to change negative language to positive language. As Nichols (2010) puts it: "usually 'problem talk' is negative, focuses on the past, and often implies the permanence of problems. The language of solutions is more positive, hopeful, and future oriented. Part of the therapist's job is to steer clients from problem talk to solution talk" (p. 321). In addition, people are experts on what they need and how to fix their problems. However, they need the therapist's direction.

Therefore, the therapist can ask some key questions that help the client to find solutions. One such question is: "What happens in your family that you want to continue to happen?" (de Shazar, 1985, p. 137). Another approach is to ask the "miracle" question like the following: "Suppose that one night there is a miracle and while you are sleeping the problem that brought you into therapy is solved. How would you know? What would be different?" (de Shazer, 1988, p. 5). Additional tool to use is the "exception" question in which the therapist asks how the family acted in the past in a similar situation, and if

the action was successful (deShazer, 1988).  One more technique used in SFT is scaling

questions in which the therapist asks the client to rate their conflict on a scale.

When people try to answer these questions, they can figure out what is helpful for

them to do.  Small changes can solve problems one step at a time.  Small successes will

encourage another success and will lead to a "positive spiral" (Nicholes, 2010, p. 323).

**Emotional Focused Therapy (EFT)**

EFT focuses on relational elements, and is rooted in attachment theory.  In this

approach, "emotion is seen as the prime player in the drama of relationship distress and in

changing that distress. It is emotion that organizes attachment behaviors, that orients and

motivates us to respond to others and communicates our needs and longings to them"

(Johnson, 2004, p. 13).

According to Johnson (2004), attachment theory has several basic principles:

1. Attachment is an innate motivating force, a need for a dependent and close

   relationship.  As Johnson puts it, "The fear of isolation and loss is found in

   every human heart" (p. 25).

2. Attachment is a secure dependence, which fosters autonomy and self-

   confidence.  Therefore, healthy relationship is "maintaining a felt sense of

   interdependence, rather than being self- sufficient and separate from others"

   (p. 25).

3. Attachment offers a safe shelter, and an attachment figure provides comfort

   and security.

4. Attachment also provides a secure base for exploration and learning new

   information.   When the attachment is secure, people can deal better with

conflicts and stress. Accessibility and responsiveness are the building blocks

for a secure bond as this fosters the trust that this figure will be there when

needed. In cases of fear and uncertainty, the need for attachment increases.

If the comforting response fails, the reaction is anger, clinging, depression,

and despair. Insecure attachment can be formed, which includes insecure

avoidant attachment, and insecure ambivalent attachment. 5- Attachment

involves working models of self and others. In secure attachment, the self-

model is that the self is "worthy of love and care and is confident and

competent… and associated with greater self-efficacy" (p. 31). The other-

model is believing that "others will be responsive when needed… dependable

and worthy of trust" (p. 31). 6- Isolation and loss are traumatizing.

"Attachment theory describes and explains the trauma of deprivation, loss,

rejection, and abandonment by those we need the most and the enormous

impact it has on us" (p. 32).

Adult love relationships are similar to child-caregiver relationships. In both

relationships, there is "a deep desire for attention, emotional responsiveness, and

reciprocal interest" (Johnson, 2004, p. 33). When attachment is secure, people are more

confident, secure, and cope better with stress. When attachment is insecure, there is

anxious preoccupation, and distraction in exploring the environment. Humans have the

need for physical contact, such as caressing, holding, and kissing, especially in times of

need for comfort. As Johnson (2004) puts it, "From the cradle to the grave, humans

desire a certain someone who will look out for them, notice and value them, soothe their

wounds, reassure them in life's difficult places, and hold them in the dark" (p. 43)

When attachment is insecure, humans respond in predictable ways:  First, anger, which is directed at the loss of the attachment figure.  Secondly, if anger doesn't help, then there is a feeling of despair and coercion, followed by separation distress.  Finally, depression and despair set in, resulting in the marital conflict (Johnson, 2008).

To bring change for couples with this conflict, there is need for a change in attachment. This begins with changes in behavioral responses, regulating one's emotions, and new relationship models of self and others.  There is a need for new attachment responses that foster secure bonds.  Treatment steps in EFT include assessment and de-escalation of problematic interactions; creating specific change events that shift and build new bonding events; and, finally, consolidating and integrating the changes into the couple's life (Johnson, 2008).

**Communication Approaches**

Communication therapy is part of many family therapy approaches.  Although there are many elements that influence human interaction (such as motivation, emotion, cognition, and conflict), communication is considered to be "the matrix in which interactions are embedded" (Nichols, 2010, p. 52).  Communication is verbal and nonverbal behavior, and includes symbols and clues that are used to send or receive meaning.  It is important for interpersonal function (Satir, 1983).

According to Satir (1983), functional families have clear, complete, congruent communication, with clear roles and rules in the family process. The rules in the family are relevant, flexible, developmentally appropriate, and consistently applied.  It has a clear interchange of information and resources within and without the system.  It

effectively operates within the context of larger (social and cultural) systems. Healthy

communication is very important in solving problems.

Satir (1983) suggests that dysfunctional families do not communicate properly.

Their interoperations of themselves and others are not accurate. These families have

unclear conflicting messages, and are not able to "check out" their meaning with each

other. This dysfunctional communication comes from low self-esteem. Accordingly, the

therapist needs to help the family to increase self-esteem and self-worth. The therapist

also needs to help the family understand their encounters and learn to improve

interactions and increase communication abilities. The therapist can do this by helping

family members to be in touch with their feelings, communicate clearly and effectively,

and accept differences in others.

**Gottman's approach**

Gottman's research (1999) indicates that "successful conflict resolution isn't what

makes marriages succeed" (p. 11). But "the heart of any marriage" (p. 46) is

strengthening the friendship of the couple by increasing positive interactions, and

focusing on the positive qualities of the other. When the positive interactions increase,

communication, negotiation, and conflict resolution will be easier. The couple will be

able to resolve their resolvable conflicts, and accept the unresolvable ones. Gottman

predicts divorce when one or more of what he names the four "horsemen of apocalypse"

(Gottman, 1999, p,27) appear. These "horsemen" are criticism, contempt, defensiveness,

and stonewalling. By teaching the couple new communication methods, they can avoid

these types of interactions and strengthen their marriage. In addition, teaching the couple

some communication techniques, such as the Speaker Listener technique, and XYZ technique, can help them communicate more effectively.

**Integrated Model**

This model refers to the simultaneous use of different theories and techniques from different approaches to help the family and the couple. Each approach provides partial explanation of the behavior, and each has strengths and limitations (Cory, 2009). Most therapists are eclectic in selecting the approaches that help them to achieve their goals (Smith & Southern, 2005). Becvar & Becvar (1996) suggest that "we recognize that each theory gives meaning to the other and each has utility relative to a given context" (p. 11).

In this case study, the approach will be integrated, as different techniques from different approaches will be used. Systems and structural approaches will focus on changing the map of the family and the structure of the relationships. CBT, SFT, Hope Focused Therapy, and communication approaches will work on assumptions and behaviors that need to be changed. EFT will enhance self-awareness and understanding of the other. And Biblical integration will support all the other approaches and strengthen spirituality. Therefore, assessment will be integrated as well, and will include elements from all these approaches for a better understanding of the family and the inter-cultural differences.

<center>**Assessment Tools on Therapy**</center>

Assessment is "an objective and standardized measure of a sample of behavior" (Whiston, 2013, pp. 3-4). The therapist gathers important information about the family in

order to understand behaviors and dynamics within the family members (Kline, 2000), and to make clinical decisions concerning intervention (Whiston, 2013).

There are several methods of assessment, such as interviews about members and family history, observation of behaviors and interaction within the family members, and questionnaires and tests (McIntire & Miller, 2006).   Assessment is integral in counseling. As Whiston (2013) points out:

> To be fair to the clients, assessment needs to be systematic and objective. With assessment in counseling, clinicians are, in essence, gathering samples of client behaviors and making inferences based on those behaviors. Therefore, when evaluating available assessment tools, clinicians should focus on the methods or procedures used for gathering the samples of behavior (p. 4).

The assessment is important in the different stages of the therapeutic process.  It includes assessing the problems, conceptualizing, and defining them, selecting the effective type of intervention, and evaluating the therapy (Whiston, 2013).

## Conclusion

Effective communication is an important component in solving conflict in marriage relationships.  Cross-cultural marriages face more sources of differences and conflicts than marriages within the same culture.  Obviously, this will add more challenges to the family.  In addition, couples from cross-cultural marriages face communication challenges which stem from their verbal and nonverbal language and cultural differences.

Different counseling theories approach conflict and communication in different ways. Therefore, integration of different approaches can be helpful for couples in conflict from cross-cultural marriages. In addition, as Christian counselors, it is important to integrate Biblical counseling. The next chapter will discuss a Biblical view on personhood and marriage.

# CHAPTER 2

# THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR COUNSELING

## Introduction

Before discussing the Bible's view of marriage, one needs to understand the

Bible's view of humanity and individual personhood, because marriage entails two

*persons*. Therefore, it is important to understand personhood, and what characterizes it.

There are a variety of views on personhood. According to Beck & Demarest (2005),

some theologians argue for the model of monism, seeing the human as a single whole

with no difference between body and soul. Others support dualism, which sees humans

essentially as a dichotomy, the body being the material part and the spirit the immaterial.

Trichotomism holds that manhood is comprised of three parts (1 Thess. 5: 23): body,

which is the physical part; soul, which represents the rational part (including reason,

emotions, and will); and spirit, which is the breath of God in human beings. The spirit is

renewed by the new birth, while the soul is fallen and remains under the control of the

flesh (Nee, 1968). Therefore, Paul urges new born believers to renew their mind to be

transformed from the patterns of the world (Rom. 12:2). All three views have been

represented in the Church throughout the ages, and all of them accept that human

personhood is characterized by three traits: supreme value, immoral nature, and broken

relationships (McDonald, 1981).

# Human Personhood

## Supreme Value

Humanity's value is stressed as early in Scripture as Genesis 1:26, "Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness.'" God created mankind intentionally, meaningfully, and purposefully. Ephesians 2:10 proclaims, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Humankind is the masterpiece of divine design. McDonald (1981) points out that "human beings are presented as the supreme object of God's special concern" (p. 2). Man, is the "highest of God's earthly creatures" (Erickson, 1983, p. 456); being created in His image, men and women enjoy supreme value.

Different theologians define "the image of God" in different ways. For Thomas Aquinas (1976), the image of God means the ability of humans to think and reason, to use language and to be creative, all capacities which animals do not have. For some theologians, the image of God is the human dominion over animals and plants and over lower creatures (Verduin, 1976). As Dale Moody (1981) puts it: "Man's most distinctive quality is the image of God by which He has dominion over all other creatures and the whole of God's creation" (p. 226). Another common interpretation is that the image is the human ability to make moral decisions, and involves social and self-awareness (Bromiley, 1988). Still others consider the image of God to be the ability to have relationship with God (Brunner, 1976).

A human is a "creature of infinite worth" (McDonald, 1981, p. 2). Jesus treated each person as having a high value (Mt. 12: 10-13, Mar. 2:27), worthy of being restored (McDonald, 1981). Human beings are loved by God. Jesus laid down his life for the

restoration and salvation of humans as stated in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (NIV).

**Immoral Nature**

God commanded Adam not to eat from the fruit: " but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die" (Gen. 2: 17 NIV).   Nevertheless, Genesis 3 records humanity's fall and disobedience, a fall which affected mankind's dependence on God, as well as their responsibility and accountability to God.  As a result, man "loses sight of his origin and end, and is capable of any species of wickedness" (Clarke, 2004, n.p.).  Adam's descendants were implicated in the Fall, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3: 23 NIV). This sin affected Adam's descendants intellectually, rationally, and spiritually (Isa. 1:3, Ps. 92:6).  It also affected them volitionally; their motives, decisions and choices were inclined to sin (Ps. 2:1, 1Pet. 2: 18-19, Tit. 3:3).  The fall affected them emotionally—in their desires, feelings, and affections (Eph. 2:3, Rom. 7:5).  Moreover, sin affected humanity morally, in terms of ethical life (1 Cor. 8:7, Tit. 1:15, 1 Tim. 4:7).  The impact extends to human functioning, behavior, and dominion (Ephesians 4: 19) (Beck & Demarest, 2005).  In sum, human nature is weakened, corrupted, and biased towards evil (Job 15:16).  Even though, the image of God in humans was not destroyed, it was deeply deformed and degraded.

**Broken Relationships**

Man was created for community and fellowship (Grenz, 1988). Anderson (2001) points out that "the image and likeness of God can be understood as a capacity for relationship with the self, others, and God in a knowing way and an openness to a future

which provides hope and meaning to life" (p. 42). Moreover, man was created out of nothing and, thus, humanity is dependent on the creator. As Jones and Butman (1991) put it: "We are different from and separate from God, though we are continually dependent on him as the ultimate ground of our very being" (p. 43). Therefore, humans are designed for a relationship with God, as well as with other humans, and the natural world (Roberts, 1997).

Sadly, the Fall has deeply and negatively affected humanity's relationships. The first consequence of sin is separation from and loss of fellowship with God (Gen. 3: 8-10). Then follows separation between man and woman, accompanied by division and disruption in human families. This condition is passed on to Adam and Eve's offspring (Gen. 4:8), affecting marriages, families, and any other relationships between humans.

Sin affects the way people relate to each other. It prevents them from being honest with God and with each other. It infuses in them a sense of shame and guilt, and the need to hide from God and from each other (Gen. 3:7-8). Sin also brought the notion of fear (Gen. 3:10), fear of God and fear of each other. Along with all this, the notion of casting blame emerges (Gen. 3:12-13). With Adam blaming Eve, and Eve blaming the serpent, each seeks to evade responsibility and to shift the blame elsewhere. The Fall even affects cognition, reasoning, and problem solving (Beck & Demarest, 2005). Consequently, conflict is represented in all kinds of human relationships, in all levels and forms.

## Marriage and Family

Marriage and family are the unity of two persons, or more, who are affected by sin. One can look at marriage (and family) from at least three perspectives:

1. The ideal marriage as represented at creation, a bond which mirrors God's original purposes for marriage.

2. The reality of marriage after the Fall, that is, as influenced by sin.

3. Marriage redeemed, that is, marriage as seen through God's plan to redeem and bring change into vital human relationships.

**At Creation- The Ideal**

In creation, God made everything to be "very good" (Gen. 1: 31). However, after creating Adam, there was something "not good": The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" (Gen. 2: 18 NIV). Adam's aloneness was not good in God's sight, because, as Mathews & Hubbard (2004) put it, "God wanted for Adam what he himself experiences within the Trinity- intimate connection with another of his kind ... Adam needed to be in relationship, not only with the creator, whose image he bore, but also with another of his kind, one like him" (pp. 177-178).

God created both man and woman in his image (Gen. 1:17). Therefore, they have equal value. As Beck (2005) puts it, "Their common creation as *imago Dei* guarantees the personal and spiritual equality of the sexes, while allowing for their complementarity psychologically and functionally" (p. 150). In this vein, God purposefully designed marriage as part of his eternal intention for human beings (Mathews & Hubbard, 2004). The primary purpose of marriage is seeking the reign of God (Reinke, 2012), and that we live in relationship with him and with each other (Stassen & Gushee, 2003). God wanted Adam and Eve to reflect his nature as they acted as responsible stewards of the earth (Hiler, 2012). God intended for marriage to be "a place where trust, openness, and

vulnerability can thrive" (Stanley, Trathen, McCain, & Bryan, 2002, p. 13). This relational bond was designed for unity and intimacy, where two people become one for the rest of their lives. It is a "covenant of spiritual unity in which the souls and hearts of both partners are joined before Him and with Him" (Stanley et al., 2002, p. 15). Moreover, God intended that through marriage, humans would give birth to new people who would serve Him (Bonhoeffer, 2009), and have stewardship of the earth and other creatures (Stassen & Gushee, 2003).

Genesis 2: 24 points out how God considers the family cell as a special unity. The man leaves his parents, and cleaves to his wife and they become one flesh (Gen. 2: 23- 24). When scriptures speak of "one flesh," this implies that this "flesh" must stay in unity that cannot, or should not, be broken. The term "one flesh" contains the concept of intimacy, love, togetherness, joining, harmony, and caring. Through marriage, God called humans into a special and joyful companionship between male and female, a union with one another as one flesh, through intimacy in sexual, personal, and relational levels. This union is the closest intimate relationship that can occur between two persons. The love that binds the couple physically and spiritually, and is expressed by care and loving acts toward one another, is a reflection of God's love to humankind (Thomas & Qualls, 2008).

Family is the prime relational experience one can have and the first place where one can learn about relationships. As Jones (1982) puts it, "Spiritual growth is concerned with companionship; first companionship with God, and second, companionship with our fellow human beings" (p. 1). Family is meant to meet the needs of its members, to provide nurture, love, and attachment. It is to be a place where individuals can express

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needs and have them met, where they experience belonging and acceptance, and receive care and support.  It is about relationship between its members, and about sharing resources, assistance, and life's purposes (Garland, 2012).

In God's plan, the marriage covenant is one that represents a permanent relationship and a high form of lifetime commitment that lasts until death (Stassen & Gushee, 2003); this covenant entails responsibility and is based on trust between a man and a woman which cannot be broken (Ennis & Tatlock, 2013).

In Ephesians 5: 22- 23 Paul gives instructions on how people ought to interact and conduct their relationships within marriage and family.  Clark (1980) comments on this passage, "The text has a practical function in regard to marriage. It does not exalt the married couple, but rather instructs them in their marriage.  Moreover, the goal of this family order is unity, an internal oneness that allows the family to be an effective cell in the Christian community" (p. 87).  In addition, God gave man and woman different responsibilities.  The basic traits of husbands and wives are "mutual sacrificial loyalty, authority, and equality" (1 Cor. 11: 1-16, Gal. 3: 26-29), (Hicks, 2002, p. 108), which meet the needs of both to feel loved and affirmed.

Between parents and children there is an authority type of relationship, while parents are asked not to be over-controlling, (Eph. 6:4, Col. 3: 21).  The mother is to provide affection (1 Thes. 2:7, Tit. 2:4) and teaching (Pr. 6: 20), and fathers to provide direction to the children (Hicks, 2002).

**The Fall- The Reality**

God's intention for humankind was that the family would be the essential cell which would multiply and fill the earth, subdue it, rule over it and have dominion over

other creatures (Gen. 1: 28-29).  However, the story of creation was interrupted.  The Bible describes how sin found its way into the world (Gen. 3), and deformed what God created.  The devil intended to deform the image of God in the human species.  Consequently, everything changed; and sin left a dark shadow over the whole world, including marriage and family (Bonheoffer, 2009).  In the aftermath of this disaster, couples and marriages continue to struggle with the painful consequences of sin.   As Yarhouse and Sells (2008) put it: "It is safe to say that pain, injury, tragedy, injustice, and sin leave a unique scar on families who seek therapy.  Disillusionment, heartbreak, hurt, hopelessness, and confusion are common characteristics of couples and families who seek assistance from counselors, psychologists and pastors" (p. 15).  In addition, sin expresses itself in the mistreatment of spouses, children, or family elders, in the form of all kinds of abuse—verbal, emotional, physical, and sexual (Beck & Demarest ,2005).

Christian marriage is a relationship, in which people have a lifelong faithful commitment to each other.  This commitment is the most fundamental component in family relationships (Stinnet & Defrain, 1985).  It is built on love and respect; valuing each other; sharing power and responsibility; sharing goods and sex; and demonstrating self-sacrifice. The marriage covenant is about promise-making and promise-keeping before God and others.  Nevertheless, many marital problems are the consequence of broken promises and lack of commitment.

In modern culture, materialism and possessions are central; pleasure and enjoyment are the goal of existence; and selfishness is a characteristic trait and behavior (Mathews & Hubbard, 2004). In addition, in contemporary culture, marriage is no longer a covenant exclusively between male and female; "marriage" can now occur with same-

sex partners, or, alternatively, some simply opt for cohabitation without commitment, concentrating merely on sexual pleasure and satisfaction. The focus falls solely on the individual and not on the unity of two individuals. We might say that marriage is "broken"; the number of divorced couples is growing (Hawkins & Fackrell, 2009). Thus, the family is broken as well.

**Redemption- The Change**

Thankfully, the story does not end with the Fall. God's love for humankind led him to design a plan of reconciliation. God wants to reconcile humans, first with himself and then with each other, by restoring broken fellowship and healing relationships. God fulfilled his plan through Jesus Christ. Jesus' death and resurrection was the bridge to bring into reconciliation (2 Cor. 5: 19). Marriage is considered to be a divine model of the relationship of the world with Christ that is intended to be "through Christ, toward Christ, and in Christ" (Bonheoffer, 2009, p. 68-70), and to be a means "by which God communicates his covenant" with humankind (Kingdon, 1988, p. 251).

Moreover, marriage is an arena of restoration and transformation (Mathews & Hubbard, 2004), in which God shapes his people to be in his Son's likeliness (Rom. 8:2). Balswick and Balswick (2007) present marriage as covenant, grace, empowerment, and intimacy based upon the models of God as a parent and Christ as a groom, in which human functioning can be transformed by Christ (2 Cor. 4:16). This transformation renews the mind (Rom.12: 2), the will (Ps. 15:12), the emotions (Gal. 5:24), the moral life (1 Pet. 1: 15-16), and behavior (Rom. 6: 13,16). In addition, it renews the image of God in human persons (Eph. 4:24, 2 Pet. 1:4).

Change within the family occurs when couples set Christ as their example and model, and receive power from him. Humans have free will and the capacity for reason, and have the ability to respond to God, to know him, love him, and worship and obey him. However, Hicks (2002) points that "until we understand fully what Christ has accomplished for us, and the manner in which he did it, we cannot understand how to implement the family responsibilities God desires" (p. 109).

Douglas Anderson (1985) suggests that marriage is a means for God to show each individual his love and mercy through the other spouse, and to encourage growth of the soul. He points out that "this comes about through two contradictory but persistent aspects of marital experience: suffering and pleasure" (p. 364-369). Martin Luther (1955) termed marital conflicts and suffering as "thorns and thistles" (pp. 195-196) which are used by God as tools to change character and encourage growth in Christ. Besides suffering, fun and joy in the marital relationship also bring growth to the soul. In addition, Anderson (1985) suggests that marriage is designed to bring salvation to the world through outreach to others. As he declares, "Every marriage needs a mission outside itself in order to thrive" (p. 376).

The marital covenant is about promise-making and promise-keeping before God and people. Marital problems many times are the result of broken promises and a lack of commitment, which is the most fundamental component in family relationships (Stinnet & Defrain, 1985). Balswick and Balswick (2007) propose a "theology of family relationship." They suggest that a family relationship can be "dynamic and maturing or stagnant and dying" (p. 21). According to their model, family is built on a covenant commitment which is centered on unconditional love. This kind of love provides

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security, leads to growth, and develops grace. The commitment gives the family members the freedom to empower one another and leads to greater intimacy within the family unit, which in turn leads to a deeper covenant. When commitment and involvement are mutual—that is, covenant loving and being loved; grace-based forgiving and being forgiven; empowered serving and being served; intimate knowing and being known—growth will accrue within the relationship. However, when this mutuality is lacking, the relationship will stagnate and will be founded on contract instead of covenant, and law rather than grace. Possessive power will likely replace empowerment and distance will replace intimacy. Thus, the relationship within the family will be harmed and damaged.

## A Therapeutic Response to the Crisis

The context of the modern family forms a culture with values greatly at odds with God's values. However, the Bible urges: "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Rom. 12: 2). Jesus directed the attention for change and restoration of relationships to a person's heart (Mt. 5: 21-28). When the heart changes, behavior will change too.

Relationships within the family are to be Christ centered, with Christ as the focus, model, and example (Eph. 5:21). Hickes (2002) notes principles of healthy relationships within the family: respect in all relationships, authority and affection in balance, redemptive value system, forgiveness, hopeful realism for a better future, divine intervention and direction, sexual and marital fidelity, and concern for the larger world.

As Clapp (1993) puts it, "To be healthy the family needs a mission or purpose beyond itself … the long and short of it is that we need a world bigger, richer, tougher than that which can be created by a little family fixated on itself and its emotional coddling" (pp. 163-164).

Therapy is one means that God uses to bring healing to his people. The word "therapy" comes from the Greek word "therapia" which means "service." It has the meaning of "ministry" and "to serve" (Wynn, 1991). Through therapy and, precisely, the ministry of Christian therapy, therapists can be tools in God's hands to bring restoration and healing to relationships, to strengthen marriages, and to restore God's purposes.

## Cross-Cultural Marriage in the Bible

The Bible records many cross-cultural marriages, which were blessed by God. For instance, when tracing Jesus' genealogy one can find three women from other nations who were married to Jewish men, and were Jesus' ancestors. First, *Rahab* (Mt. 1:5), a harlot of Jericho (Heb. 11:31; Jam. 2:25); then, *Ruth*, a woman from Moab, one of the ancestors of king David, (Mt. 1:5); and *Bathsheba*, the wife of Uriah the Hittite (Mt.1:6), who came from the Hittites which were a pagan tribe related to the Canaanites (1 Kin.11:1-2). Moreover, through Christ, Jews and Gentiles become one in their belonging to the kingdom (Gal. 3:28).

## Biblical View on Communication

Communication is a fundamental and an important component of human relationships (Olson & Defrain, 2000). It is the ability to talk and listen to others.

Communication can be verbal and non-verbal. It can happen between humans and God, as well as between a person and others. Beck (2005) notes that "the human person is capable, horizontally, of connecting with and communicating with others, and of feeling love of self (I-self) and other personal subjects (I-thou). He or she possesses the capacity, vertically, to relate with, respond to, and worship God (I-Thou)" (p. 151).

The Bible puts a premium on communication and gives many suggestions as to its best functioning. The Bible teaches about the importance of listening (Prov. 20:5, Jam. 1:19) and silence (Pro. 17: 27- 28); it emphasizes the importance of "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4: 15 NIV), and speaking with respect (Eph. 5: 22-25) and transparency (Gen. 2:25). Other aspects considered vital to godly communication are confession, forgiveness (Col. 3: 16), and patience (Pro. 22:15). Also important are treating the other as oneself (Mar. 12:33); not offending in speech (Jam. 3: 2); choosing the right timing of talk (Eccl. 3:1); avoiding harsh words (Prov. 15:1); praising (Phil. 4:8); encouraging each other (1 Thess. 5:14); and much more besides (Nartey, 2014). Communication promotes emotional intimacy as feelings are expressed, understood, and validated. It also promotes trust and vulnerability (Jam. 5:16). In addition, effective communication promotes unselfishness, forgiveness, conflict resolution, and the dissipation of anger (Spencer & Tracy, 2009).

**Summary**

Humans are highly valued by God who created them in his image and likeness. He invests them with a special worth above the rest of creation. However, humanity fell into sin, thus, their nature became immoral; humanity's relationship with God and also intra-human relationships were broken. Marriage was meant to be an ideal relationship

that brings glory to God; however, after the Fall, marriage became a relationship between two people both struggling with their broken natures.  Thankfully, redemption is available by Jesus' work on the cross—redemption of fallen personhood, of the relationship of humans with God, and of human relationships, including the marital bond.

# CHAPTER 3

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## Introduction

All marriages face conflicts, all families face relational difficulties (Tallman & Hsiao, 2004). However, cross cultural marriages can be more stressful, adding another dimension of difficulty to the relationship (Hsu, 2001). These marriages can face challenges based on differences in personality and behavioral patterns much like other marriages. But, the cultural differences can exaggerate these problems, and may require greater attention in solving them (Frame, 2004). As Hsu (2001) puts it: "Intercultural couples have a greater likelihood of encountering problems because they hold even more diverse values, beliefs, attitudes, and habits than couples who are of similar cultures" (p. 225).

## Culture

However, before addressing the topic of cross cultural marriage, one needs to understand what culture means. According to Brumann (1999), culture means:

> The whole complex of traditional behavior which has been developed by the human race and is successively learned by each generation… It can mean the forms of traditional behavior which are characteristic of a given society, or of a group of societies, or of a certain race, or of a certain area, or of a certain period of time. (p. 17-18)

Culture is learned (Axelrod, 1997) and socially transmitted (Bailey & Peoples, 1998). It includes a wide range of phenomena such as shared beliefs, values, knowledge, art, law, morals, custom, norms, meanings, and behavior patterns among a group of people (Samovar & Porter, 1995). It represents the socially acquired life-style, ways of thinking, feeling, and acting (Harris, 1975).

## Cross-Cultural Marriage

International integration and global interaction has given people from different cultures and different backgrounds the opportunity to build intimate relationships with each other and to form cross-cultural marriages (Jacobson & Heaton, 2008). Cross-cultural marriage refers to a marriage between two people with ethnic or racial differences (Kim, 2008); that is, each one of the spouses comes from a different culture and a different background (Gudykunst, 1994).

The differences in culture can affect the couple in many arenas. They may face social disapproval from family and friends; discrimination and racial hostility; stress in setting up their household; tensions over sex-roles; and also differing expectations about work, holidays, and traditions. There may also be differing ways of expressing affection and varying problem-solving styles (Biever, Bobele, & North, 1998).

Hardy and Laszloffy (2002) distinguish between healthy and dysfunctional couples in cross cultural marriages. For them, healthy couples:

> Find ways to balance the forces of separation and connection, and are able
> to embrace their similarities and their differences, and they can

acknowledge and integrate both the pleasures and the pains they

experience together as a couple. (p. 574)

Dysfunctional couples cannot accept differences. One or both of them believe

that the other must deny part of him\herself to preserve the relationship. The result is a

combination of "disconnection, disavowal, and domination" (Hardy & Laszloffy, 2002,

p. 547). Healthy couples distribute power between themselves; they balance and share

power. By way of contrast, in dysfunctional couples, one of the partners exerts

disproportionate power over the other and enjoys the benefits of it. The other partner is

more vulnerable to exploitation, violation, and degradation, and may possibly be

subjugated (Hardy & Laszloffy, 2002). One important consideration in assessment is to

find out how the couple negotiate their differences. According to Hardy & Laszloffy

(2002), healthy couples negotiate their differences openly while acknowledging issues

and talking about them. Each respects the other's perspective, and they work out win-

win solutions. Meanwhile, dysfunctional couples have difficulties in accepting

differences; they negotiate these differences through domination-subjugation modes in

which the relationship is marked by hostility, and one tries to subjugate the other to

his/her will. In this relationship violence and abuse are likely to emerge. Another

dysfunctional way of working out differences is to respond to the tensions by

disconnection and withdrawal; among such couples, affairs are likely to occur. In

addition, dysfunctional couples tend to resort to triangulation, especially with the

children, a pattern harmful both to children and parents.

Romano (1997) suggests that spouses in cross cultural marriages need to learn

first about themselves as individuals in their culture; then they will be able to learn about

their partner in his or her cultural setting. They need to "know what to do about their differences and make them work for instead of against them" (p. xviii), and to learn to accept the way their partner prefers to be (Hardy & Laszloffy, 2002). Even so, the process of understanding one another's behavior is a long process (Romano, 1997).

In the case study of this thesis the partners come from very different sorts of cultures: The wife is a Christian Israeli Arab, a native of a collective culture. The husband is a Christian European with roots in a much more individualistic culture. Thus, it will be important to examine the characteristics of each of these cultures.

**The Collective Cultures**

The Christian Arab culture in Israel is collectivist in orientation. Collective societies are characterized by diffused relationships and mutual obligations and expectations; the social unit has a common fate, goals, and values. These values are centralized (Schwartz, 1990). The group is the center; the individual is a component of the group which includes family, clan, ethnic, religious, and other groups (Oyserman, 1993). Accordingly, group membership is central to identity (Hofstede, 1980). Personal goals reflect the goals of the group. In these structures, maintaining harmonious relationships with others of close bonds and sacrifice for the common good are very high values (Oyserman, 1993). In collectivism, life satisfaction comes from carrying out social roles and obligations successfully (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Collective societies restrain the expression of emotions; personal feelings are not manifest in an open and direct fashion (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

**The Individualistic Cultures**

In individualistic cultures, the primary groups are narrow and the social relations are negotiated (Schwartz, 1990). Individuals focus on rights above duties (Hofstede,1980). The focus is on personal responsibilities and freedom of choice (Waterman,1984). The person's primary concern is oneself and one's immediate family. The emphasis is on self- fulfillment and personal autonomy. The person's identity is based on one's accomplishments and achievements (Hofstede,1980). An individualistic worldview puts personal goals above social ones (Sampson, 1977; Triandis, 1995). Accordingly, in individualistic cultures it is very important to create and maintain a positive sense of self (Baumeister, 1998). Such cultures value personal success, having unique personal attitudes and opinions, and feeling good about one's self (Oyserman & Markus, 1993). Individualism considers open emotional expression and achieving personal goals as highly important (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Moreover, individualism works through relationships and groups to achieve their goals (Oyserman, 1993).

**The Counselor**

Some of the challenges facing cross-cultural couples are universal, while others are culture-specific. Therefore, in treating such couples, it is important for the counselor to be prepared to counsel clients from cultures different than their own (Daya, 2001). To achieve a good counseling relationship and outcomes, it is crucial for the counselor to be self- aware with respect to his or her own cultural background. This will reduce the chances of the counselor imposing his or her own worldview on the clients (Arthur &

Stewart, 2001; Hardy & Laszloffy, 2002).   The counselor is also more likely to be aware

of the clients' worldviews and to respect their belief system, values, and practices

(Kitaoka, 2005).   The better counselors understand their own cultures, the more likely

they are to understand other cultures (Hardy & Laszloffy, 2002).

The counselor needs to consider well the two cultures of the couple (Bowman &

Fine, 2000).  It is necessary to recognize and evaluate the values, norms, and practices of

each partner, recognizing that behaviors are learned and enacted in the context of culture.

Therefore, to achieve an accurate assessment, understanding, and right intervention, it is

important to address cultural context in cross-cultural marriage counseling (Pederson,

1989).   So, for example, counselors might help clients to understand their cultural

differences by asking how these differences have benefited their relationship, and how

they have hindered it (Biever, Bobele, & North,1998).  A counselor who shares a culture

with one of the spouses should try to connect equally well with both spouses, even the

one who is from a different culture from the counselor, especially if they share a cultural

background with one of the spouses (Biever, Bobele, & North,1998).

**Intervention**

With couples who are from different cultures, one needs to see all marital

difficulties from the view point of cross cultural differences.  There are a variety of

individual differences that can be stressors for any couple, for example, differences in

personality, habits, personal beliefs, and values (Bhugra & De Silva, 2000), as well as

variations in expectations of gender roles and child rearing style (Bustamante et al.,

2011). In cross cultural marriage, there are many other sources of stress such as

differences in cultural values and worldview; religious and ethnic beliefs and customs; social and family reactions; and communication styles. On all these grounds, miscommunication and misunderstanding can be a serious stressor in the relationship (Bustamante, Nelson, Henriksen, & Monakes, 2011).

## Communication in Cross Cultural Marriage

Communication is the basic component in human interaction, it is the exchange of information, feelings, thoughts, and meaning between people through verbal and non-verbal messages, which include voice tone, body language, gesture, and facial expression (Satir, 1983). It involves three aspects: what one says, how, and when it is said. So, which words are used, what body language is used, and the timing of speech are all vital (Odukoya, 2008).

In cross cultural marriage, the partners may not share a common primary language. Therefore, the stress in communication can begin with the difficulty of the couple in understanding each other (Cools, 2006; Waldman & Rubalcava, 2005). They may not understand the meaning of something articulated, or they may be unclear on the beliefs and values behind what was said. They may also face difficulties in understanding one another's nonverbal communication, such as tone of voice, gestures, and eye contact; all this may increase their communication issues (Romano, 1997). In addition, communication style, that is to say, the way the message is delivered and the way it is interpreted, can be different in different cultures (Patel, Li, & Sooknanan, 2011). These communication challenges may increase the conflict within the couple (Oetzel, Dhar, & Kirschbaum, 2007).

Any marriage counseling involves communication, verbal and nonverbal, as an underlying framework for its process (Bond & Bond, 2004). It involves establishing and maintaining effective speaking and listening skills (Dawson, 2000). This is even more crucial with the cross-cultural couple, where communication may face even more serious challenges (Oetzel, Dhar, & Kirschbaum, 2007).

**Communication Intervention in Cross Cultural Marriage**

Differences are opportunities for deepening relationships; therefore, conflict can be described as "building relationships as you negotiate" (Propst, 1997, p. 60-61). In addition, family interactions influence the individual's cognition, behavior, and emotions. Communication training and problem-solving skills are important in treating marital conflicts that involve poor communication (Oliver & Margolin, 2008). Problem solving is advanced through the acquisition of effective communication skills (Stanley, Trathen, McCain & Bryan,1998). As Stanley et al. (1988) put it: "It's not what your problems are, it's how you handle them that will matter most in your marriage" (p. 71).

According to Chen's proposal (1989), communication difficulties should be addressed in four areas: personal attributes, communication skills, psychological adjustment, and cultural awareness. Personal attributes refer to the ability to understand oneself; this involves self-awareness, self-disclosure, self-concept, and social relaxation. Communication skills include both verbal and nonverbal communication, related to which are linguistic skills, flexibility, social skills, and interactional management. Psychological adjustment is the ability to function in foreign environments, new situations, and in scenarios of stress and frustration. Finally, cultural awareness

relates to how much one knows about another culture's systems, values, customs, and norms.

Collins (2007) points out that effective communication skills are learned slowly, and usually by watching others. However, many families use ineffective communication styles which leads to difficulties in relationships; therefore, there is the need to learn new communication skills. Gottman and Silver (1999) use the metaphor of "the four horsemen of the apocalypse" to describe communication and conflict styles that indicate the likelihood of divorce.

**The four horsemen of the apocalypse.** According to Gottman and Silver (1999), these four horsemen symbolize conquest, war, hunger, and death in marriage because of poor communication. The first horseman is criticism. When one spouse criticizes he or she usually is pressing a complaint or a request by generalizing the character of the other, for instance: "You always do that, you never do this," and so on. This sort of communication is a kind of attack, and will not bring the desired results. Complaints or requests need to be about a specific issue, and are best expressed by using the "I statement" technique. Such an approach might sound something like this: "When you did… (the complaint), I felt…. I want, or I wish… (the request)." The second horseman is contempt. This culprit is characterized by disrespect, name-calling, or body language that expresses sarcasm; it puts the other spouse down and engenders feelings of worthlessness. The couple needs to be aware of the words they use and of their body language, and simply to avoid the negative practices of the "second horseman." The third horseman is defensiveness. The spouse reacts to the other's attack by trying to find excuses for his/her behavior. Unfortunately, this defensive attitude ignores the other

spouse's need and misses the point they are trying to make.  Rather than putting up

defenses, it would be better for the spouse to simply apologize and to take responsibility

for his/her actions.  The fourth horseman is stonewalling.  One spouse tries to turn away,

leave the room, stop engaging, or change the subject in order to avoid conflict, instead of

confronting the problem. Stonewalling spouses are usually trying to calm themselves

because they feel overwhelmed; perhaps they have endured "prolonged exposure to

stimuli that evoke relatively high levels of inappropriate or excessive anxiety or fear"

(Zoellner et al., 2008, p. 202).   However, the other spouse may interpret the reaction as

apathy or a lack of care.  One needs to identify when a spouse is struggling with

"emotional flooding" and to agree to take time out and to talk about the issue another

time (Gottman & Silver, 1999).

Stanley, Trathen, & Bryan (1998) suggest the Speaker-Listener technique as a

communication technique which aims to improve conversation between a couple, but not

to solve problems all on its own.  In this method, the couple talk about one topic at a

time. The conflicted couple establishes an object that represents "the floor" for them

(remote control, card, etc.). The one that holds the floor is the speaker, while the other

one is the listener.  The rule is that when the speaker is talking the listener must listen;

he/she may only utter words that show that he/she is engaged and understands what the

other spouse is saying.  It is acceptable for the listener to paraphrase, and to use body

language that shows understanding.  Understanding does not necessarily imply total

acceptance of what one is hearing.  Then the floor is switched to the other spouse, and the

roles are reversed. There are some rules:  The speaker needs to speak for his/her own

thoughts, feelings, and point of view using the "XYZ" technique (*in situation X, when*

*you do Y, I feel Z).* Additionally, the couple ought to talk about one subject at a time, and try to keep it short. It is important to give the listener some time to paraphrase and to say what he/she heard in his or her own words. If the paraphrase does not match what the speaker means, the speaker needs to clarify the point again. If the listener disagrees with what the speaker says, he/she still needs to wait until receiving the floor to talk about it.

However, the study of Gottman et al. (1998) pointed out that "the active listening model, which is the most common component of current models of marital therapy, occurred infrequently in the resolution of marital conflict, and was not the predictive differential in marital outcomes" (p. 17). Wile (1995) pointed out that:

> It is impossible to make "I-statements" when you are in the "hating-my-partner, wanting revenge, feeling stung-and-needing-to-sting-back" state of mind. At such a moment you cannot remember what an "I-statement" is, and frankly, you do not care. (p. 2)

Therefore, Gottman's et al. (1998) study recommended that therapy relinquish the active listening model, and instead try to help couples to increase softness and gentleness from the start, and to develop soothing interactions. In any case, there is yet another main component needing to be addressed in cross cultural marriage, namely, the attachment style of the couple.

### Adult's Attachment

The process of the early child-mother relationship includes issues of attachment, subsequent issues of separation, and issues of unresolved loss and grief. We are touching on, of course, the "overarching rhythms of life" (Guernsey, 2000, p. 24). Research

indicates that communication within the attachment relationship affects the child's

attachment style, and is relevant across the life span (Bowlby, 1973). Bowlby (1979)

asserted that humans maintain attachment bonds "from the cradle to the grave" (p. 129).

In infancy, the attachment figure is usually a parent. However, in adulthood it can be any

relationship that serves the three functions of attachment: protection, security, and safety.

This relationship may be a romantic partner, close friend, or sibling (Shaver &

Mikulincer, 2007).

Early attachment experience with caregivers affects the thoughts, memories,

beliefs, expectations, emotions, and behaviors towards the self and others throughout all

an individual's other relationships (Mercer, 2006). Importantly, this attachment

experience affects the choices and behaviors of couples in their marriage relationship.

When the relationship with the caregiver is secure, then the adult's marital relationship is

more likely to be secure; if it is ambivalent or avoidant, such will also likely be the case

in the adult's relationships (Guernsey, 2000).

Johnson (2004) suggests that distress in the marital relationship is a result of

insecure attachment and separation distress. Separation from the attachment figure is

considered to be a traumatic stressor; one may respond in fight, flight, or freeze

responses. When attachment is insecure, aggressive responses may emerge in the

marriage relationship, alongside control and abuse issues (Mikulincer, 1998). The

subject may be resistant to closeness, may worry that their spouse doesn't care about

them, and may find it difficult to trust others (Mickelson, Kessler, & Shaver,1997).

Individuals with secure attachment are likely to demonstrate positive and constructive

communication (Shi, 2003) such as open and direct communication (Collins & Read,

1990); integrative problem solving techniques (Lopez, & Brennan, 2000); self-disclosure (Pistole, 1993); and reciprocal understanding (Feeney, Noller & Callan, 1994). They can assess their conflicts from a basis of self-worth and have mutual trust in their relationship (Pistole, Clark, & Tubbs, 1995). When both partners are secure in their attachment styles, they are likely to have a healthy and satisfied marriage relationship (Hazan, & Shaver, 1987).

Research (Leyendecker, Lamb, Scholmerich, & Fricke, 1997) indicates that there are differences in attachment patterns based on region of origin, collectivism, acculturation, and ethnicity. These differences stem from the differences of child-rearing norms in each culture (Leyendecker et al., 1997). According to Hofstede (2001), there are differences between individualistic and collectivist societies, which are related to family functioning and interpersonal values. For example, some studies indicate that people in collective cultures tend to be more dependent on others and more fearful of rejection (Agishtein & Brumbaugh, 2013) and are higher in avoidance attachment than in individualistic western countries (Cheng & Kwan, 2008).

## Conclusion

Cross cultural marriages face additional challenges as compared to marriages in the context of the same culture. These challenges stem from the differences in cultural customs and norms, communication patterns, and attachment styles. In the treatment of a cross cultural couple, one needs to take into account Wynn's (1991) definition of family therapy, which is "the practice of treating a family in a collective unit, taking into account the system through which the family members interact" (p. viii). In the context of this

paper, one may replace the word "system" with the word "culture." In addition,

counselors who are working with cross cultural couples, need to be aware of and

understand their own culture, as well as the couple's culture, and to give special attention

to the unique challenges and stress sources in these marriages.

# CHAPTER 4

## DESCRIPTION OF THE FAMILY

### Introduction

Mark, a 30-year-old European, and Rita, a 29-year-old Israeli Arab, have been married for seven years and live in Israel. They have two children, Eiad, a six-year-old boy, and Amalia, a five-year-old girl. They met in a church conference while Mark was visiting Israel. They started dating a few months later. After about a year, they got married.

Rita was referred first to therapy by her pastor, after an escalating conflict with her parents over her decision to separate from Mark. In the initial phone call with Rita, she complained with anger: "My relationship with my parents, especially my mother has become so complicated that I'm upset. I don't want things to continue the same." Rita believes her mother is a controlling person who wants to interfere in her life and marriage.

In the first meeting with Rita, she shared about a serious argument she had with Mark three weeks ago. She wanted him to help her with the children and around the house, but he refused because he was tired. She was angry and accused him of being irresponsible and lazy. The argument escalated, and they ended up deciding to separate. Nevertheless, Rita called her pastor and asked for help. The pastor invited them to come to his office the next morning. However, Mark refused to meet with the pastor or to seek any kind of help because he did not want others to interfere in his personal life. This attitude made Rita furious, and she decided that she would leave him. Since he has no

family in the country, they decided that she is the one that would leave the house and stay with the children at her parents' home until they find a better solution. She called her mother and told her that she needed to stay with them for a while because of her problems with Mark. Her mother welcomed her. However, the moment she entered the house, her mother yelled at her and accused her of being the one that is causing these marital problems. Rita yelled back, accusing her mother of being judgmental. Her mother continued to blame her for her problems with Mark, criticized her parenting, the way she takes care of her house, and her finances. Moreover, she criticized her relationship with her girlfriend, using bad words to describe the negative influence Rita's friend has on her. Her father was there, but he did not say anything during this loud and hurtful argument. Rita was angry and hurt. She turned to her father hoping to receive some help from him, but he agreed with her mother. He said, "You need to change and to be a better wife for your husband." Feeling abandoned, Rita left her parent's home after she announced that she would never ask any help from them again and went back to her home. That night, after Mark and Rita discussed their problem, they agreed to stay together and find solutions.

However, Rita was still angry with her parents and refused to talk to them or visit them anymore. After hearing from the mother, the pastor tried to reconcile Rita with her parents. However, he realized there are some relational issues that need to be worked on with the help of a family counselor. However, Rita refused to go with her parents, but agreed to go alone.

Rita explained that her marital relationship was better, but not the parental situation with her parents, especially her relationship with her mother. She stated with

anger, "My mother interferes in my life; she relates to me as to a child and tries to control my life … I want her to stop that." Rita's relationship with her parents was escalating to a point that would threaten the future of the relationship, but she still did not want to have a family counseling session.

During the individual sessions with Rita, she brought up some marital issues causing conflict in her relationship with her husband that were threatening their marriage. Once again, she was thinking about separation from Mark unless they could resolve their problems. She pointed out, "Living without him is better than staying with him, anyway I'm doing everything alone, so why would I want to stay with him?"

After recommending they come for marital therapy, she agreed. Nevertheless, Mark did not feel like he needed therapy. A few weeks later, they had a big fight that ended with her leaving the house and deciding to leave Mark for good. She told him that she will not come back home unless he agrees to go to therapy. As a result, Mark came to therapy with the intention of being there for only one session.

When Mark came to therapy, he said that he thinks their marriage is a normal one, and that their problems are common for any normal couple. Nor does he think they need any therapy. Nevertheless, he came to the session because Rita put pressure upon him. She complained that "he doesn't think that he needs to change, which makes me crazy, I'm considering separation from him." Then she added that he is childish and not responsible. She feels if he were responsible, he would try to fix the marriage. Mark, on the other hand, thinks that Rita exaggerates everything and that the problem is within her and does not involve him. He believes that she is a controlling person like her mother. In

addition, he said, "She never says sorry, she never admits that she makes mistakes.  I am the one who apologizes even when it is not my fault."


## History of Chief Complaint

Rita and Mark got married seven years ago.  Rita had a part-time job, but Mark could not work because he was not as an Israeli citizen and had no permission to work. Since they had very little money, they lived in Rita's parents' house.  This living situation caused stress and frequent arguments between Rita and her family, especially her mother. In addition, Rita and Mark argued a lot over the involvement of her parents in their lives.

Later on, Rita and Mark rented a small apartment with some financial aid from her parents. Meanwhile, Rita got pregnant and gave birth to their first son, Eiad.  She needed help in taking care of the baby.  Her mother rushed to help her, as any Arab mother would do.  Narjes, Rita's mother, visited her daily, helped clean the house, cook, and take care of the baby.  However, Mark, who came from another culture, viewed this over-reach of his mother-in-law in their lives as offensive.   When his parents visited them to see their grandson, Mark's mother suggested that they come to their country and stay with them.  This would allow Mark to work and take care for his family's financial needs, while Rita can parent their child.  A few months later, the couple moved to Europe with their son.  They lived with Mark's parents, but they had their own part of the house with shared kitchen privileges.  Mark found a job in a marketplace, Rita stayed home to take care of their son.

From the very beginning, the relationships with the European in-laws was not good. Rita felt like a stranger among them. The in-laws required them to share in paying

the rent and for their food, which was strange for her, especially after staying in her parents' house without paying anything.  Besides, Rita expected her mother in-law to help her in taking care of the baby as her mother did, especially when she found out that she was pregnant again.  Nevertheless, the mother-in-law did not offer any help because she worked outside the home.

Even after Rita gave birth to Amalia, her mother-in-law did not offer to help with the children.  Rita complained to her parents about the way her in-law treated her, they felt sorry for her, and, a few months later, they sent her tickets to come back with her family to Israel.  They agreed to rent them an apartment and help them to settle down.

Even though Rita and her own family were living in their own apartment, she spent most of her days with her parents, so they could help her with the children.  She returned to her house in the evenings.  Thus, her parents were too involved in her life and interfered in their family issues.  Mark disliked this type of involvement and hated the continual arguments Rita had with her mother.  A few months later, when Rita's mother got a new job, she asked Rita to stop coming every day.  Rita was angry, but at some point, she understood that it was better for her marriage and her parenting to set some boundaries in the relationship with her parents.

According to Rita, a few weeks prior to the first counseling session with the couple, she asked Mark to help her around the house and feed the children.  He complained that she is too needy and never satisfied, which makes him feel that he is not able to please her.  Their argument escalated.  Rita was mad at Mark, and felt like she wanted to be alone.  She dressed and put on her make-up. When Mark asked her where she was going, she replied that she wanted to drive around to calm down.  Mark did not

want her to leave because he wanted her to "finish what she just started."  However, she did not want to answer him and prepared to leave.  "She always withdraws when we fight… I want her to say something… the worse thing she would say would be better than her silence," he pointed out.  "I don't want to talk," she replied, "It's better for me to shut up than to say something and make it worse." Nevertheless, the more she tried to avoid fighting with him, the pushier Mark became.  He held her and did not let her go. She threatened to leave him and declared that she preferred to divorce than to live with him. He grabbed her arm in a painful way, which made her angrier. She tried to leave the house, but he locked the door.  After struggling with him, she was finally able to leave with the children.  She went to her parents' home and stayed there with the children for two days. She did not agree to come back until he promised to come to therapy.

**The Complaints**

In the first session of the marital counseling, Mark complains that when they have an argument, Rita shuts down and becomes silent, which makes him angry. He tries to push her to say something, using nasty words to irritate her and make her talk back to him. The pushier he becomes, the more silent she turns.  Rita states that his behavior makes her mad, and when she is mad she needs her space and wants to be alone.  This pattern describes their fighting style since they got married.  However, in the last year Mark is using his hands to get her out of this cycle.  He holds her tightly, grasps her arms and presses her face. The situation has escalated to a point that Rita is convinced that she is not able to live with him anymore.

When asked about the issues that cause contention, both agreed that most of their fights are around the children and the house work.  Rita complains that Mark is distant

from the children, and that she's the one who cares for their needs, while Mark is the one that punishes by spanking and shouting. According to Rita, his discipline methods only add to the conflict. When Eiad tries to get attention from Mark, he doesn't have time for him and sends him away. Also, he is very distant from Amalia. Because he ignores them, the children often seek his attention in ways that only provoke him, so he punishes them. Conversely, Mark thinks that Rita spoils the children and does not know how to set boundaries. To Mark, Amalia is a difficult child whose continual whining grates on his nerves. Because he is not able to be patient with her, he tries to stay away from her, which leaves the burden on Rita's shoulders. Rita accuses Mark of spending most of his time in the house playing computer games instead of playing with his children.

Rita complains that Mark is not social with friends and family. He prefers to stay home instead of visiting family or hanging out with friends. Mark explains that this is not the case. His problem is that he needs things to be planned, while Rita makes spontaneous and immediate decisions. As a result, she takes the children and visits family or friends while he stays home alone. Moreover, when she is out, she does not text him or call him which make him feel neglected.

In addition to these issues, Rita feels that Mark is not interested in her. He never asks about her day, or what she is doing. And if she tries to initiate a conversation with him, he answers briefly and impatiently. Therefore, when she needs somebody to listen to her, she turns to her friend Lilian, who listens and empathizes with him. Mark does not like her relationship with Lilian, because Rita spends more time with Lilian than she spends with him. Rita thinks he is jealous because she fills the gap that he leaves empty in her life.

Rita pointed out that Mark shows interest in her only when he needs sex, which she tries to prevent because she doesn't want a relationship with him based on sex. Mark reacts with anger when she brought up this topic because she had refused sex from him for more than six weeks. Rita said that sex with him makes her feel like a sex machine which she hates. She needs him to be emotionally available.

The children, as described by both of them, are difficult. Eiad has troubles behaving at school. Rita took him to be checked out, and it seems that he has Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). However, he is a very clever boy. He has issues with being obedient, therefore he is very often punished by Mark. This makes Rita angry because she doesn't believe that spanking the child will discipline him. Rita and Mark argued in the session about what is good discipline. Mark accused Rita of shouting at Eiad all the time and believes that if she would spank him, he would behave better. Recently, no kind of correction is working with Eiad. He does whatever he wants without giving any attention to what his parents ask him to do. Eida's teachers complain all the time about his misbehavior at school and with his peers. Rita believes that the teachers do not treat him justly, and very often she goes to school and argues with the teachers. Last month, the doctor recommended giving him Ritalin. This medication calmed him down, and he is doing slightly better at school.

Amalia, on the other hand, is a difficult child. She had difficult time learning to speak, and it is still difficult for them to understand what she says. When she needs something, she does not try to communicate with words; she screams and cries until she gets what she wants. Her behavior makes the couple frustrated and stressed. Most of the time they shout back at her and refuse to answer her until she stops screaming.

Sometimes this is helpful, but other times it does not work. She continues to cry until she is tired. Last year the doctor discovered that she has some hearing problems, and she had surgery. Now that her hearing has improved, her speaking is getting better. However, she is still screaming and crying when she wants something. Mark thinks that Emalia brings stress to the family, and many times they fight because of her.

## Rita's Family History

Both of Rita's parents came from big and poor families. Her father Awad, the third son of five brothers, came from a broken family. His father was an alcoholic and abused him physically. He left school, joined the work force around age 13, and was soon addicted to alcohol and gambling. The relationship between Awad and his brothers never was a good one.

Narjes, Rita's mother, was the fourth of five siblings with whom she has a good relationship. Because of her father's handicap and inability to work, she left school and joined the work force at a young age to support her family. Awad and Narjes' marriage was bad most of the time that Rita remembers. However, separation was never considered. They have three children.

Rita is the oldest of her siblings. Her two brothers are Salem, 28 years old, and Naser, 19 years old. During her childhood years, her father was an alcoholic, and her mother was the main caregiver in the family. She over-functioned to fill the gap that her dysfunctional husband caused. She worked hard to bring food and to raise her children, while her husband was dysfunctional and drunk most of the time. When Rita was four years old, her parents received Jesus as their savior and joined a church, and her father

quit drinking, got a job but kept gambling.    However, her mother continued to be the

dominant one in the family, making the decisions and managing the household.  When

Rita was 12 years old, her father had a financial collapse.  He became deeply depressed

and went back to alcohol for about 10 more years. During these years, Rita functioned as

her mother's assistant joining together against her father.  For instance, her mother gave

her the money to hide from her father because he used it to gamble. In addition, she

helped raise her brothers and tend to the house.  As a result, Rita feels that she missed her

teen years by caring for the family.  When Rita was 22 years old, her father stopped

drinking and went back to work.  During all these years, her mother was the main

provider to the house and the one that managed the family.

For Rita, her mother is controlling and takes the man's role in the house because

her father is passive and allows her to do that.  She is close to her brother Salem, but not

Naser.  Naser is rather introverted and independent.

Rita admits she very similar to her mother. She thinks that she inherited her

mother's personality, and as she puts it, "I like to be the leader of my life and to be

independent. I like to manage my life's issues alone.  Sometimes I feel that I act in

controlling ways like my mother does."  Nevertheless, Rita dislikes these traits in herself.

Rita grew up among cousins, mostly boys. Therefore, she enjoyed playing with

them and dressing like them.  She began to consider herself as a female only when she

went to college and began to imitate her girlfriends.

**Rita**

Rita is thin, short, and attractive.  She dresses appropriately to the season.  She

mostly wears casual clothes, such as tee-shirts with jeans.  She does not wear makeup or

add accessories.  She has few friends, apart from Lilian who is her best lifetime friend that began at school at a young age.

Rita and Lilian spend quite a bit of time together, especially because their children's ages are close.  In times of trouble, both lean on each other because they consider each other as soul mates. Rita was an average student and never really liked school.  When she finished high school, she took specialized course in a college to study computer design.  She has a full-time job that pays well.

In general, Rita is a healthy person.  She suffers from occasional allergies, especially during springtime, but she does not consume any medicine.  She has no psychiatric history.  Her thinking is logical, clear, and direct, without any obvious impairment.  There seem to be no hallucinations, delusions, or any other perception problems.  She doesn't have any problems with judgment or memory and can learn from experience.  Rita's mood is intense and angry, which fits with her current circumstances. She has good orientation to time, persons, and place. She recognizes self and others, has no suicidal ideas. According to DMS-5 (2013), Rita can be classified under "other problems related to primary support group, and gets V61.10 code (Z63.0), which represents relationship distress with spouse or intimate partner."

**Mark's Family History**

Mark's father, Randy, came from abusive family and suffered from anger issues. Randy married a woman who cheated on him, so he abused her emotionally, as a result, they finally divorced.  Then he and a girlfriend, had a daughter (Melissa) from her, but the relationship did not work out.

Mark's mother, Diane, comes from an abusive family as well.  Her father was a tough man as Mark describes him who also was an alcoholic. Her mother suffered from anger issues and drug abuse.  Because she was being physically abused, Diane was moved out of the house and placed among 17 foster homes until she became 18. She had a boyfriend that abused her as well.  They had a son (Mike), but the relationship did not work out.

When Randy and Diane married, they had three children together, John, Mark, and Margaret who were raised in the same house with Mike and Melissa, Mark's step-siblings. Mark is the second son.  His older brother, John, was born with heart defect, and went through an open-heart surgery. By then, Randy and Diane had converted to Christianity.  At age 3 John was injured in a car accident and lost sight for three years and had a brain damage.   His sister, 10 years younger than Mark, was born with some heart problems, which healed slowly without any medical intervention.

Mark's relationship with his mother was stressful. She gave her main attention to John, because of his health issues, while Mark spent most of his time with his father. Mark reported that he used to be embarrassed about his mother's talk and behavior. However, in the session, he couldn't identify the exact behaviors or ways of talking that embarrassed him.  Mark was defensive of his mother and made excuses for her behavior. It seems that Mark does not want to talk about his family's failures or weaknesses. Later, in a private conversation, he pointed out that Rita criticizes his family, and, therefore, he will not talk negatively about them in front of her.

His father, as Mark remembers, was a good man who never abused them.  He spanked them when they needed to be punished. However, his mother's interaction with

him was painful, unreasonable, and embarrassing. He describes her as a tough woman who did not know how to express feelings or deal with issues. Nevertheless, she refused to admit that she needed help. He remembers that she hurt him, but he did not recall any specific situations. He remembers that she was a forgiving person.  Mark respected his father more; however, he loves his mother and understands how her hard background affected her behavior.

Mark had a very complicated relationship with his brothers. John's brain damage caused him to have tantrums and rage attacks. As he grew older, very often he had epileptic seizures.  His parents were afraid that he would hurt himself, since he loses control and hits anybody or anything surrounding him.  So Mark's job was to hold him until he calms down. In addition, John's temper was so bad, which made him fight with Mark and beat on him very often. Because his behavior became uncontrollable, his parents sent John to an institution. After that, Mark's father spent more time with him and he became his best friend.

**Mark**

Mark is a tall, strong and handsome man. He wears T-shirts and jeans appropriately to the season.  Mark went to an elementary school where he did not have friends and was teased and picked on by the other children.   For high school, he was home-schooled, attended church and took some Bible college type classes.  He did not go to college and did not obtain any high education or career.  He dated only one girl at age 16, which he defines it as "a puppy love."  After that he met Rita.

Mark grew up on a farm and spent most of his time with his father working on the farm. They watched sports, hunted, and worked together. These activities with his father

made him feel loved.  His mother, on the other hand, showed love by giving gifts and taking him shopping.  His father was his only friend. He did not trust people, only his father. He did not have a good relationship with his brothers.

In Israel, Mark finds it hard to develop friend relationships, especially because he does not speak Arabic or Hebrew very well. Moreover, most of the people surrounding him do not speak English. therefore, he has only a few friends.  One of them is a missionary that is 15 years older than he is. They meet with each other frequently. Recently he started a new job in a Christian institution. One of the workers is American, and Mark enjoys conversations with him.  However, Mark feels lonely because of lack of social relationships.

In general, Mark is healthy.  Sometimes he suffers from stomach sensitivity. Anxiety makes it worse causing him to have diarrhea and hemorrhoids.  He does not take any drugs.  There is no psychiatric history.  His thinking is clear, his reasoning is logical, and he has good perceptions and judgment. He does not have any hallucinations, delusions, nor memory difficulties. He can learn from experience. His mood is normal for the circumstances.  He has good orientation to time, persons, and places.  He recognizes self and others and has no suicidal ideas.  According to DMS-5, Mark can be classified under "other problems related to primary support group, and gets V61.10 code (Z63.0), which represents relationship distress with spouse or intimate partner."

## Case Formulation

Mark, a 30-year-old European man, is married to Rita, a 29-year-old Arab Israeli woman. They have two children, six and five years old. Their marital relationship is

conflictual, and they are in a crisis stage. The level of stress in their relationship is very high.  Rita is considering leaving Mar, and has thought about it for long time. Using Hope focused marriage counseling can prevent the couple from considering this option, and would encourage them to work on saving their marriage by emphasizing the strengths in their relationship and working with them to focus on these strong points. As Christians, Mark and Rita go to church together; however, they do not pray or read the Bible together. They manage their spiritual life separately. Both pray on a daily basis, but neither of them reads the Bible regularly. They do not participate in discipleship small groups at church.  They find it difficult to depend on God or rely on him in everyday life situations.  Encouraging them to invest in their spiritual growth may add hope to their relationship and teach them how to seek the help of the Holy Spirit in their marriage.

Rita and Mark's Communication style needs to be adjusted.  At first glance, one can recognize the difference in nuances and meanings they use when they think and talk in their own mother tongue.   It seems that their cultural differences affect their communication and the way they interpret each other's words and body language. In addition, one can notice their lack of listening and communication skills.  They use vulgar words to describe each other. Criticism and contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling are part of their communication styles in conflict, which, according to Gottman and Silver (1999), effect marriage in a negative way and predict divorce. Using Gottman's Couple's Guide to Communication (Gottman, Notarius, Gonso, &Markman, 1976), and some communication techniques from "A Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for your Marriage" (Stanley, Trathen, McCain & Bryan,1998) can help the couple gain some new skills in communication.

In addition, a big portion of their conflicts center around child-rearing. A psychoeducational approach, as a Cognitive - Behavioral approach, on parenting and child-rearing, can help the couple to do better in their parenting style and decrease the conflicts about what is right and wrong in raising children.  In addition, it would give them tools to strengthen their parenting skills in dealing with their children. The couple might join a group of young couples who are parents and can help them work as a team and learn from the experience of other couples who struggle with the same issues.

Mark and Rita argue regularly about household needs.  Using a Cognitive-Behavioral approach can help them to share the chores and have less stress about this issue, while using the principles of Hope-Focused marriage counseling to promote love by works.

Socially, Mark has no support system and no friends, even though he is surrounded with potential friends from work and church.  A Cognitive-Behavioral approach would help Mark to be more confident in building relationships with mutual and personal friends.

Beyond the physical needs of helping around the house and with the children, there are some hidden emotional needs.  Rita claims that Mark is selfish and does not care for her needs. She complains that he is not available when she turns to him and has no interest in her life, nor does he listen patiently as she tells him about what is going in her life. These issues point to her need for caring and recognition.  On the other hand, Mark complains about her withdrawal and refusal to fight with him and about her threats to divorce him.  These points to his need for connection and commitment. In addition, he complains about her talking against his parents which irritates him and prevents him from

telling her about his childhood, which points to his need for acceptance. The couple is not aware of their emotional needs. They know that they are angry, but they do not seem to understand the foundational emotions such as fear of rejection. According to Emotional-Focused Therapy (EFT), emotions can be differentiated into primary, secondary, and instrumental responses (Greenberg & Johnson, 1988). While the primary emotions are the direct responses to a situation, the secondary ones are the reactions to these emotions. The instrumental emotions are used to manipulate the responses of others (Johnson, 2004). Rita's and Mark's secondary emotions of anger and defensiveness are the ones they express, rather than their primary emotions of rejection and hurt. When they become aware of their primary emotions, they will learn to react to them differently and effectively.

Nevertheless, both Rita and Mark have a problem in communicating emotions with each other. Yelling, blaming, criticizing, using bad words and excuses are their typical modes of expression. Gottman et al. (1998) point out that people do not communicate facts; they communicate emotions. Their verbal and non-verbal communication reflects anger and frustration. According to Virginia Satir (1983), the therapist's primary goal is to deal with family pain. She suggests, "Pain comes from feeling alienated, of feeling unloved, of feeling doubtful about your lovability" (1975, 79). The couple needs to learn to share their feelings rather than acting them out. When family members share their vulnerable feelings or desires, the hostility decreases and the listener's empathy is increased (Nichols Michael, 2012). Helping the couple to gain some communication skills can affect their relationship and may reduce their conflicts.

Emotional Focused Couple Therapy (EFCT), would be a good approach to help the couple to explore their needs and fears and to communicate emotions and develop understanding of feelings based on these needs. EFCT approach can help Mark understand Rita's need for him as a friend who can show care by talking and listening to her about her daily life and to understand her feelings when he is not doing as she asks. In addition, it can help Rita to agree to stop threatening Mark to divorce him, and to stop leaving him anxious and frustrated during their fighting. She needs to commit to talking about the situation as soon as possible, and to set an exact time to do that. Mark, on the other hand needs to understand her need for space and the need to be alone for a while. Moreover, there are some sexual issues: when angry at Mark, Rita refuses to have sex with him, sometimes for more than two months.

According to Attachment theory, attachment type develops personality traits that shape adult relationships (Worthington, 2005). Rita's attachment style is likely to be insecure and avoidant which explains her need to be alone when she is stressed and anxious. Rita complains that she spent her early childhood with absent parents. Her mother was at work most of the time and was emotionally distant from her. She "provided all material things we needed, but never provided affection or love. She wasn't there when we needed her emotionally." Rita's main caregiver was her grandmother. This can suggest that Rita has some attachment issues with her mother, and that her dependency on her mother was ineffective and insecure. Insecure attachment leads to a negative self-model, that is characterized by the image of the self as helpless and unworthy, and to a negative other-model that is characterized by the image of the other as unreliable and rejecting (Bowlby, 1988). This can explain Rita's ambivalent

dependency on her mother.  Until now, her parents are good in giving money, gifts,

helping with material needs and babysitting the children, but she has no emotional

interaction with them.  She is not used to hearing an affectionate word from them. She

does not feel safe with them, nor does she feel safe without them. Therefore, Rita needs

to come to a point that she will be able to declare her separateness and independence

from her mother.  When Rita can form a secure attachment to another caring figure, she

will be able to separate from her parents.  This figure can be the therapist.  Therapy,

somehow, is a sort of parent-child relationship, which would start by building a secure

relationship between Rita and the therapist, that is supportive and emotionally available,

without any parental authority.

Mark's relationship with his mother was embarrassing, (no details provided). In

addition, his mother wasn't available since she was busy caring for his sick older brother.

Mark's main relationship was with his father, which he describes as his best friend. This

description suggests that Mark's attachment style is ambivalent and insecure. This

explains why Mark feels very angry and anxious when Rita attempts to leave him without

explanation of her feelings and threatens to divorce him.  Moreover, Rita reports violent

behavior from Mark towards her when she doesn't want to argue with him. Using the

terms of attachment, the motivation for anger is the need for reestablishing "a soothing

contact" (Dutton, 2007, 115).   As Donald G. Dutton (2007) puts it:

> When the attachment system is activated for a long time without reaching
>
> termination, angry behavior is observed in the infant. Hence, a
>
> fundamental conclusion of attachment theory is that anger follows unmet
>
> attachment needs. The original anger stems from frustrated and

unsuccessful attempts to attach. When the stressed infant seeks soothing

contact and it isn't available, the result is rage, followed by depression and

then indifference. In other words, the original motive for anger is to

reestablish soothing contact. In adults, endogenous tension cycles bear an

eerie resemblance to attachment process in children (p. 151).

Mark finds it difficult to self-soothe his feelings; he desires the contact with Rita

to be able to relax. Her withdrawal exacerbates his tension and builds it up. It is

important that Rita understands this process as the cause of Mark's violent behavior and

promise to come back to talk with him when she is soothed herself by getting her private

space. Giving him an exact time when she would be available (this time doesn't need to

be far from the event) could reduce his anger and hence, his reaction.

Rita is over-reactive in her relationship with her parents and with her husband as

well which can refer to low differentiation. She is even afraid to make new friendships

because she knows that she is over-reactive and can harm relationships with others.

Rita's difficulties in separation from her mother can suggest, according to the structural

approach, that Rita is in an enmeshment relationship with her parents. Her boundaries

with them are diffused and unclear (Minuchin, 1974). The sub-systems here are

undifferentiated. She let her parents be involved in her life, even though it bothers her

and her husband. In addition, she is very much involved in their life. Rita needs to clarify

boundaries and put the generations in separation. She needs to learn to put healthy

boundaries between herself and her parents and to find a better balance between

involvement and separation.

Rita's most intimate relationship is with her friend Lilian.  Somehow, Rita thinks that Mark is jealous of her friendship with Lilian.  But because he doesn't spend time with her, she spends time with Lilian who became closer to her than Mark.  According to Systems and Structural approaches, there is a triangle of Rita, Lilian, and Mark, with Lilian occupying Mark's place in Rita's life.   He feels that he has been left out. Rita is eager to have an intimate relationship with him, but she wishes he would be patient, listen to her and give advice when needed.  But since he seems uninterested in such intimacy with her, she has replaced him with her friend who knows how to meet her emotional needs.  The structure of the intimate relationship will change only when Rita gets the emotional attention from Mark, and they learn how to invest in their own friendship. Then the subsystem of the couple will be strengthened, and the triangle would break.

Using some techniques from Solution-Focused Couple therapy approach such as "What if you wake tomorrow and your marriage is perfect what would be different?" would help the couple to focus on the areas of change and issues that are problematic for them, such as their sexual needs.

Rita and Mark have some difficulties in parenting their children.  They need to learn to set clear boundaries and to be assertive and available for their children. They need to learn communication skills and model them to their children.  Using mentalization, which is the ability to understand the mental state, of oneself or others, that underlies overt behavior (Bateman & Fonagy, 2012), with Amalia, would help her express her needs and emotions. They need to use reinforcement (Berridge, 2001) to reshape Eiad's behavior.  They need to build a schedule for the children which can make room for them as a couple to be together as well.

## Conclusion

Rita and Mark are trapped in a circular conflict that is based on their daily interactions. However, the primary difficulty is stemmed from their cultural differences and expanded to their personal differences. Their attachment style, family system and structure, alongside their poor communication patterns, conflict resolution skills, and their weak spiritual life add more difficulties to their marital relationship and influence their parenting. Addressing these issues can help the couple to cope with life challenges, strengthen their marriage, and bring happiness to their relationship.

# CHAPTER 5

# INTERVENTION

## Type of Intervention

After working on her issues with her parents in eight individual sessions, Rita wanted to have marital counseling to deal with her issues with Mark.  At the beginning, Mark was not interested in participating in couple therapy; however, he attended the first session with the intention that it would be the last.  After the first session, he decided that he would continue in therapy, so they had a couple counseling. For one meeting the children were included.   After the third session, they cancelled the appointment, then came back after about a month for five additional sessions.  By then their relationship improved, which made them feel that they had reached their goals. However, three months later they came back after another escalation in their conflicts.  Altogether, they had a total of fifteen weekly sessions.

## Assessment Tools and Assessment Outcomes

In addition to the interview, certain assessment tools were used. Intake was filled in the first two sessions; the other tools were applied during the following sessions.

**Intake for Couple Therapy** (appendix 1)

Intake results describe the main issues causing the couple to struggle in their marriage.  These results highlight their communication difficulties, child-rearing struggles, arguments over household tasks, and in-law's involvement. Neither of them are aware of their own feelings and do not express their feelings and needs appropriately. The intake shows a very low satisfaction in the marital relationship, especially sexual

intercourse. For Mark the major problems in their marriage are the time Rita spends on Facebook and her withdrawal and disengagement when they fight. While for Rita, the issues are the lack of time they spend with each other and the lack of help around the house and with the children. Both are in a high level of stress concerning their relationship.  In addition, the intake emphasizes their low spiritual involvement. Close observation can show that they lack communication skills; they do not listen to each other, interrupt one another, and use bad words to describe each other.  They express a lack of respect, anger, criticism, condemnation, and judgment as part of their communication.   Mark wants to see Rita less negative in her temper and attitudes.  Rita wants Mark to be more engaged in her life, interested to spend time with her, and to be a helpful partner in the demands of children and house.

**Family Genogram** (appendix 2)

The genogram shows the fusion, enmeshment and tension between Rita and her family of origin, especially her mother, and the lack of clear boundaries between them. According to Systems approach, the boundaries between the subsystems need to be strong enough to allow the subsystem to function appropriately.  Boundaries that are strong and rigid lead to disengagement within the subsystems and prevent effective communication with other subsystems. On the other hand, weak boundaries are considered as diffuse and lead to enmeshment in the relationship among the rest of the system (Schultz, 1984).

**Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships (PAIR)** (appendix 3)

The PAIR shows the needs of the couple.  According to the assessment, Rita feels lonely and emotionally alienated from Mark.   Her main needs are that Mark would listen

to her, spend time with her, have fun together, understand each other, and have shared interests. Mark's needs are to have a better sexual life, enjoy mutual interests, have shared friends, and receive love, affection, respect, and understanding.

**Areas of Change Questionnaire** (Weiss, 1975) (appendix 4)

According to this questionnaire, Rita wants Mark to keep the house clean, pay the bills on time, and start an interesting conversation with her. She knows he would want her to spend time with him and the children, to give him attention when he needs it, to assume responsibility for finances, and to leave him to himself. Mark wants Rita to participate in decisions about spending money, have meals ready on time, go out with him, and have sex more often. He knows that she would want him to help with the housework when she asks, spend time with the children, and give her attention when she needs it.

<p align="center">**Individual sessions with Rita**</p>

**Type of Intervention**

Rita requested an individual intervention, even though family intervention was more appropriate for the situation. She did not want to include any other person in the sessions. Rita wanted to know how to deal with her anger at her parents and how to build healthy boundaries with them.

**Goals of Therapy**

The main goal of intervention is first symptom relief. Rita was very angry and emotionally flooded, especially in the first session. The therapy aimed to deal with her feelings of anger, tension, frustration, and rejection by listening and showing empathy and compassion. She also needed suggestions to reduce immediate stress and raise a sense of hope.

The second goal is self-understanding.  This is to help Rita to get a true picture of what is going on within herself by identifying self and emotions. She will see a true picture of what is going on in the world that surrounds her and how people feel and think in their interaction with her.

Third, Rita needs to learn effective communication skills when communicating feelings, thoughts, and attitudes. In addition, she needs to learn effective ways to express emotions and encounter others without hurting them.

The fourth goal is to teach Rita conflict-resolution skills, which would help her to reconcile with her mother and have a better relationship with her parents. This would encourage her to maintain and keep a healthy emotional relationship with them and deal with her insecure attachment with her mother.

The fifth goal is to promote spiritual growth by helping Rita to acknowledge the presence of God and to spend time praying and reading the scripture.  In addition, this would bring her to a spiritual wholeness by helping her to deal with spiritual struggles by relying on the Holy Spirit and finding meaningful beliefs and values.

The sixth goal is self-development.   This would help Rita to come to self-actualization by focusing on her abilities and potential and to use her strengths in reaching her goals.  This would also provide support in times of stress and crises by letting Rita know that she is welcome to come back for counseling whenever she needs it again.

**Rapport of Sessions**

Rita seems friendly, responds positively to feedback and answers questions readily. She is talkative and well-spoken.  Her facial expressions are attentive, alert, and

sometimes angry but appropriate to the situation. She has good hygiene. She dresses in an acceptable and appropriate way, suitable to the weather. She is in an appropriate mood. In the first session, she is overwhelmed with anger but after catharsis, she can discuss the situation. She can understand her emotions and see the hurt and frustration beneath her anger. Rita's attachment is insecure. However, as Sonkin (2005) puts it, trust alliance with the therapist, as an attachment figure that is trustworthy, can help in building a new attachment experience. When the therapist watches non-verbal signals, and works to interpret them and responds to them appropriately, the therapeutic alliance starts to develop, which is the key to a positive outcome.

Rita's attachment to the counselor helps her to experience a secure attachment, which makes her feel unconditionally accepted. In addition, she can recognize her fears of abandonment and separation from her mother, enabling her to understand her attachment needs. Rita is ready to forgive her mother but is not ready yet to apologize. She feels that she is the victim and is not able to see her part in the equation.

In the ensuing sessions, she could see the lack of boundaries in her relationship with her parents. In addition, she was ready to learn how to set her boundaries. The change began by deciding to visit her parents only once a week and spend the rest of the week with her children at home. However, in the beginning it was very difficult for her to take care of her children alone, which increased her anger, frustration, and disappointment in her husband. He was supposed to help her, but his help was not enough, which added stress to their marriage.

In sessions, Rita learned some new communication skills, such as using the "I statement technique." Nevertheless, she could apply them in all her relationships, but not

with her parents. She believed that it would not help because they would not understand the new way of communication she was trying to use. She resisted trying harder to have better communication with her mother. She said that she is not ready for it yet.

By the end of the sessions Rita joined one of the ladies' groups at church and began to attend the meeting every two weeks. In addition, she was ready to come for couple therapy with her husband.

## Couple Therapy

Correction in the system can occur only if someone from outside the system interfered (Nichols, 2010). Nevertheless, in couple therapy, the client is the relationship (Wynn, 1991). Therefore, the purpose of the intervention is to bring change into the marital relationship. However, "Only by acting differently do people change, and psychotherapists, to do any good, must eventually influence their patients' 'willpower,' 'determination,' and 'perseverance'" (Nichols, 1987, p. 56). To do so one needs to notice the structure of the family. Structural approach reacts to the concept of "man as part of his environment." (Minuchin,1974, p. 4). As Minuchin (1974) puts it, "a man is not himself without his circumstances" (p. 5). Wynn (1991) defines family therapy as "the practice of treating a family in a collective unit, taking into account the system through which the family members interact" (p. viii). Therefore, intervention needs to aim to the family as a system.

### Goals of Therapy

Stemming from the information that was collected from the first session, the assessments, the interactions, and the issues the couple brought into the sessions, some

goals were established.  The first goal was symptom relief.  Both came to the first session

angry and irritated with each other. Rita intended to leave Mark if she sensed there is no

hope from therapy.  Mark, on the other hand, came to therapy intending to have it only

one time. He came just to please Rita because she was threatening to leave him if he did

not agree to go to therapy.   The goal was to deal with their feelings of anger, tension,

frustration, and rejection by listening, showing empathy and compassion, and giving

some suggestions to reduce immediate stress and arouse a sense of hope.  By infusing

hope that through therapy they would be able to overcome difficulties, the threats of

divorce can be removed, even if Rita was not ready yet to go back home.

The second goal was self-understanding and awareness.  The aim was to help Rita

and Mark get a true picture of what is going on within themselves, by identifying self and

emotions and by enhancing self-awareness of their feelings and thoughts that affect their

behaviors. Moreover, the goal was to help them to understand and to get a true picture of

what is going on within their spouse, to understand their feelings and attitude, what is

going on in their relationship, and to respect the vulnerable areas of each other.

Hopefully, Rita will stop attacking Mark's family and threatening to leave him, and Mark

will give Rita space when she feels overwhelmed when fighting.

The third goal was to help the couple to work on respecting and accepting each

other's culture, to understand the other's background, beliefs, and values, and how all of

these affect their behaviors and influence their interaction.   As Paolo Freire (1994) notes,

"No one goes anywhere alone, even those who arrive physically alone…we carry with us

the memory of many fabrics, a self-soaked in our history and our culture" (p. 31).

Learning new communication skills, was the fourth goal. Rita's pattern of communication with Mark was very like her communication pattern with her mother. As Segrin and Flora (2011) put it, "Interaction and experience in the family shape the course of our lives and are forever carried with us." Therefore, teaching the couple how to communicate feelings, thoughts, and attitudes would decrease the effects of their communication styles brought from their families of origin. In addition, the couple will learn some effective ways to express emotions by using new skills and techniques that enhance couple communication, such as speaker- listener technique, XYZ technique, Gottman's four horsemen of the apocalypse, and alternative ways of talking to each other.

Fifth, building friendship will strengthen the marriage. Rita and Mark will be encouraged to spend more time together doing enjoyable activities that both like to do. In addition, they will learn to identify and use their own and the other's love language (Chapman, 2004).

Sixth, another goal is to help the couple to change their automatic thoughts about each other. As Beck (1995) points out, "core beliefs are the most fundamental level of belief; they are global, rigid, and over-generalized. Automatic thoughts, the actual words or images that go through a person's mind, are situation specific and may be considered the most superficial level of cognition" (p. 16). Rita's automatic thoughts about Mark are that he is lazy, selfish, and unreasonable. In addition, she believes he is not interested in her. Therefore, he is not willing to listen to her when she tries to share things with him. Mark's automatic thoughts are that Rita is a controlling woman. Besides, he is not sure she loves him because she refuses his physical touch and having sex with him. These

thoughts are a source of their anger towards each other. As Donhue, Kendar, & Gorney (2008) point out, "Anger is an internal affective experience….it may be experienced as negative impulsive reaction to a specific stimulus in the environment." In this case the couple's negative thoughts and interpretations about each other stimulated anger.

Seventh, the couple will get help with parenting skills by educating them about child development and rearing and dealing with their specific parenting issues. They will be encouraged to join a psycho-educational parenting group that takes place at church.

Eighth, the couple will learn conflict resolution skills. According to Systems theory, conflict in the family is cybernetic, which maintains homeostatic state through negative and positive feedback processes. The members engage in a circular interaction, which activates learned mechanisms that keep the family homeostasis. The feedback within the interaction of the family can be verbal or nonverbal and can be negative or positive. The negative feedback is the one that tries to stop the conflict and go back to the equilibrium and prevent escalation, (Goldenberg, Goldenberg, & Goldenberg, 2014). The goal is to stop the circular interaction by teaching the couple to communicate their needs differently, helping them to make plans to manage household demands by working as a team and appreciating each other for any work of love.

The ninth goal was to enhance sexual satisfaction. Rita said that she "punishes" Mark by refusing to have sex with him for several weeks. This made Mark feel rejected by her and increased the tension in their relationship. By helping Rita to understand Mark's feelings when she refuses to have sex with him and to understand his sexual needs, sexual satisfaction can be enhanced for both of them.

The tenth goal was to change the structure of the family system by setting new boundaries with Rita's family of origin and with her friend Lilian and by establishing healthy friendships with others. Rita and Mark were affected by the way their families of origin raised them. According to Nichols (2010), families of origin define our identities and affect our relations with others. As Nichols puts it: "Unresolved emotional reactivity to our parents is the most important unfinished business of our lives" (Nichols, 2010, p. 113). Rita has low differentiation from her mother. The individual's differentiation from the parents can be projected in a marriage relationship. The family system has the power to damage and build the lives of its members; therefore, the brokenness can occur by the family, and by the family it will be healed (Wynn, 1991).

The eleventh goal was to promote spiritual growth and wholeness by helping Rita and Mark to acknowledge the presence of God and find meaningful beliefs and values. Neither of them were committed to pray and read the Bible or to participate in church groups which affects their spiritual growth negatively and the way they deal with struggles and conflicts.

The twelfth goal was helping the couple in self-development and self-actualization by focusing on their abilities and potential and educating them in marriage and parenting. This can happen by encouraging them to engage in marriage-strengthening activities or programs that address cross-cultural marriages and in parenting-education programs. Such programs would help them to understand their differences and give them new perspectives and ways of dealing with their struggles.

The final goal was to provide support for the couple in times of stress and crises. They need to know that they do not have to struggle alone with their issues and that they

are welcome to come back for counseling whenever they need it again, especially in particularly difficult times.

**Course of Therapy**

In the beginning of therapy, Mark's thoughts are logical and well-ordered. He has good orientation of time and place, and his mood fits with his current situation. He seems frustrated and sad, but he is very friendly, polite, and responsive, willing to cooperate and answer questions. His posture is relaxed and appropriate to the situation. He speaks English and some Arabic. His hygiene is good, and his clothes are suitable to the weather. Rita is angry; her speech is irritated and flooded, and she is speaking English and Arabic at the same time. She is in a bad mood, impatient with Mark and interrupts him very often, especially if he says something with which she disagrees. She is talkative and initially does most of the talking, especially because Mark does not think that there are any problems. Rita describes their conflicts and the struggles they have. In the beginning of the first session Mark denies that there are any problems in their marriage. He considers their struggles as normal that any couple would face. In contrast, Rita is very angry and irritates him by blaming him for his nasty words and unacceptable behaviors. However, by the end of the first session, he shares some of the difficulties he faces with Rita and is ready to come again. On the other hand, catharsis helps Rita to calm down and to talk about plans to help her marriage. With the help of Hope Focused Marriage Counseling approach, hope was infused in almost every session, thus helping them to see the positive potential of their relationship.

In the first stages of therapy, a therapeutic alliance started to be established with Mark, who became more responsive in sharing his concerns. When finding empathy, he

could bring up some of his struggles with Rita and ask for help.  People have the core need of understanding and acceptance.  As Nichols puts it "empathic response of the therapist helps the individual feel understood and accepted.  Empathy is achieved by open and receptive listening" (Nichols, 1987, p. 33).

Using EFT techniques and understanding their attachment styles, the couple could learn how to talk about their feelings and the way they understand and interpret each other's behavior.  They could understand their own feelings and needs, as well as the other's feelings and needs, which made them more understandable to each other's responses during the fights.  Rita told Mark about her flooding feelings and her need to be alone. Mark could understand her need to sooth herself before engaging in conflict resolutions, and how she feels suffocated when he tries to force her to stay or to talk to her. Rita, on the other hand, could understand Mark's need to be engaged, his fear of being forsaken, and how he feels abandoned when she leaves the house.  They agreed that he will give her space when she is angry, and she will tell him what time she will be ready to talk about the issue later.  Before she takes her time alone they would set another time for talking, and she would commit to be there and talk.  Thus, Mark stopped being pushy and is ready to wait until Rita is soothed.  After some sessions, the couple reported that they could do these changes, and, as a result, their fights became less intense.  Both felt loved even during conflict.

The couple learned about the Gottman's Four Horsemen of Apocalypse and how to avoid them and use alternative communication skills. They learned the XYZ and Speaker-Listener techniques.  However, it was very hard for both to keep using them. Even in the session, when they practiced the techniques, they couldn't keep the rules and

quickly resorted to their own pattern of communication.  After the session on communication, they did not come back to therapy; they had excuses for not coming back.  This absence may reflect some type of resistance.  Sometimes families resist change which can come out of "fear of changing and a fear of disturbing the peace" (Nichols, 1987, p. 259).  The resistance can be seen when family members forget homework or cancel their session or come late to the session. However, after about one month, they made an appointment. They reported that it was difficult for them to practice the communication skills even though they tried. Their communication pattern roughly did not change. "Lasting change takes place through a spiraling process of altered (interpersonal) interaction and enriched (personal) understanding.  A therapist who works with both individuals' experiences and family relationships must shift focus to concentrate sometimes on the interpersonal (the system) and sometimes on the personal (the self)" (Nichols, 1987, p 33.)

To strengthen their marriage, they were asked to spend fifteen minutes a day talking and sharing things about their lives and what happened during the day, giving attention to each other and showing affection.  In the first two weeks, they were able to have only a few meetings a week, for a few minutes a day, and most of them ended with fights.  They were directed not to talk about what is wrong in their relationship or about their conflicts or difficulties, but to talk about regular things, such as their work or how they spent the day.  Rita complained that Mark has nothing to say about his work and that he is impatient with her when she shares the details of her day.  Mark pointed out that talking about what she did during the day in detail is boring for him.  Rita was able to tell him how much she needs that and how his attentiveness can make her feel loved. In

addition, she let him know that she is interested in knowing about him, which makes her feel that she is part of his life. Mark tried harder, with many failures along the way. However, by the end of the therapy, they enjoy each other's company, and the fifteen minutes expanded to a longer time. They could talk about different issues they face and to work on their struggles and difficulties. While Rita could spend more time with Mark, she spent less time with her friend Lilian, thus taking Lilian out of the triangle with Mark. They also made some family trips with the children, which they all enjoyed. In addition, they were introduced to the five love languages (Chapman, 2004), and they enjoyed discovering what their own and their spouse's love language is. Rita's love language is work of service, while Mark's is physical touch. They successfully practiced it at home and were surprised how much they felt loved by their mate.

Rita and Mark were asked to jot down the personality strengths of their mates and of themselves and to discuss how they can use this knowledge in strengthening their marriage. One main mutual strength for both is faithfulness, which brought them to discuss and commit to be faithful to each other and to their marriage.

Cultural issues were talked about in almost every session. Such discussions might start with, "In my country, we do things in a different way," or "Here you must do that in this way." They also talked about the different interpretation of words or behaviors in their different cultures. Even though both of them appreciate some parts of the other's culture, Mark seems to dislike some of the social interactions in Rita's culture, such as the over-involvement of her family in their lives, while Rita dislikes his family's alienation. She hates his lack of social interaction with friends and family, while he is irritated with her over-interaction with friends, especially her friend Lilian and family.

Arguing over what is right and what is wrong seemed to be their struggle at home. In the sessions, they learned the importance of respecting each other's differences, while trying to compromise for the other person and adapt some of the other's culture. Rita is already in a stage of setting boundaries with her parents. They agreed to have trips with their friends. Using the structure and systems approach helped the couple to set healthy boundaries with Rita's family and friends and to stop Rita's triangle with Lilian and come closer to Mark.

The household tasks were a big issue that they talked about in the sessions. Each of them blamed and accused the other for their shortcomings. According to Solution-Focused therapy, "Focusing on problems and the past (which clients can do nothing about) can inadvertently blame clients and make them feel defensive, while focusing on goals and holding clients responsible for their future actions can be experienced as much more optimistic and liberating" (Sharry, 2007, p. 24). Therefore, the couple is asked the "Miracle Question" (de Shazer, 1988, p 5): "What would your household tasks look like if a miracle happened and you were able to come to an agreement about how to manage your household tasks?" Both could share their expectations with enthusiasm and to plan for that. They agreed to give that plan a try for one week, and after that they would decide if it was effective or not. With the help of Cognitive Behavior approach, they divided the household tasks between them and went home with a "fair enough" plan that both agreed about. Their automatic thoughts about each other was changed as well. In the sessions, they learned to rephrase and change their interpretations of each other's behaviors, which helped them to see things in a different perspective. Changing their cognition helped them change their behaviors as well. The next week Mark mentioned

that he began to enjoy doing the dishes since he is feeling very appreciated by Rita. Rita thinks that since Mark has begun to help around the house, she is more relaxed and able to show appreciation. The household tasks became a less intensive issue in their relationship. Even though from time to time they still struggle, they know how to get back on track.

In the session with the children, Eiad and Amalia misbehaved. They did not obey when their parents asked them to quit their misbehaviors and showed a lack of boundaries. Mark and Rita screamed at them and communicated poorly with them. When parents communicate poorly, the children will communicate poorly as well (Becvar & Becvar, 1996). Therefore, Eiad and Amalia screamed and talked back to their parents. Rita was angry, and Mark threatened to punish them when they go home. At some point the couple argued with each other because of the children, which intensified the stress among them. As Nichols puts it "Even in healthy families, children bring great potential for stress and conflict" (Nichols, 2010, p. 172). Finally, Rita called her father to come and take the children. Mark and Rita were encouraged to participate in a child-rearing program.

They joined a parents' educational group in the church. They gained some education about child development and needs, in addition to learning some new parenting skills. They learned how to work as a team in setting and maintaining boundaries for their children. They learned some communication skills, such as Cognitive Behavioral approach, to teach the children new behaviors. However, the change with the children's behavior was not satisfying because it lasted for only a short time. The couple continues

to struggle with issues with the children.  Nevertheless, they began to have a family day on Saturdays, which includes activities that they and the children do together.

Mark established a new friendship relationship with men his age.  He hangs out sometimes with one of his new friends or invites him to his home. Rita understood the triangular alliance she has with her friend Lilian.  However, the more time she spends with Mark, the less time she needs with Lilian.  Her meetings with Lilian are fewer, but they do keep meeting weekly.  According to Rita, the relationship with her friend seems healthier than before.

The couple were taught about the power of relying on the Lord and giving him the priority in their relationship.  They learned to recognize the power of the Holy Spirit to bring change into their lives and relationships.  At first, they argued that they do not have time to read the Bible or to pray together.  They were given some Bible-reading homework, but they did not complete it.  However, in the end of therapy, they reported that they began to read the Bible separately. And, from time to time, they pray together and with the children. Rita has started a new Bible plan that she shares with her friend Lilian. In addition, she and Lilian have joined the young mothers' group at church which can be a place for spiritual growth and provide an opportunity to be active in the church. Mark hopes to make some changes in his work schedule, so he will be able to join the men's group in church.

**Recommendations**

The couple was recommended to have family sessions with the children in order to work on their parenting issues and to help them in dealing with child-rearing by providing psycho-educational therapy.  In addition, they were encouraged to have

additional therapy sessions to strengthen their marriage and to deal with crisis and changes whenever they feel they need it again.

## Summary

Cross cultural marriage is one that faces unique challenges compared to other marriages, especially because of the differences of beliefs, values, gender roles, and customs that each of the spouses bring into the relationship. Communication is a main component to be addressed in such marriages. If the couple's primary languages are different, there would be major differences in verbal and non-verbal communication and ways of interpretations, which is influenced also by their cultural differences. If any couple has communication issues in their marriage, their different cultures and backgrounds will intensify their poor communication and highlight their lack of communication skills.

Rita and Mark come from different cultures and were raised in different countries. When they marry, these differences, alongside the normal differences and difficulties any normal couple faces, cause their relationship to be conflictual. They are insecure in their marital relationship and do not feel loved by their mates. They struggle over daily issues, mainly because of a lack of healthy communication and problem-solving skills, which are magnified by their cultural differences. Their conflicts escalated to a point that they considered separation.

Christian therapy is meant to help the couple to restore their relationship with God and with each other by setting God in the center of their marriage and by obeying biblical teaching on marriage. Coming to therapy helped Rita and Mark to see their challenges

from a different perspective and to see how their different cultures added stress to their relationship. Utilizing different therapeutic approaches, including integrated biblical counseling, helped the couple to see their struggles from different perspectives, to change their cognition and the way they think about each other, to learn new communication and problem-solving skills, to become aware of their attachment style and learn to communicate their emotions and thoughts properly. Even though they are not fully successful in learning new communication skills, there are some minor changes in their communication styles that have influenced their relationship positively. They have learned how to put Christ in the center of their marriage and to give more attention to their spiritual life. Moreover, they learned to take personal responsibility over what is going on between them by seeing their parts in the equation. By the end of therapy, they could see the positive traits in their mates and to feel loved again. In addition, they could restore their relationship with God and with each other.

Rita and Mark believe that there are plenty of additional changes that they want to do in their marriage and are very open to learning new skills to improve their relationship. They mentioned that even though their marriage is at its best now, they do not want to quit counseling. They want to continue coming to counseling from time to time to keep themselves accountable and to deal with the small issues immediately instead of allowing them to accumulate and become large problems.

In the light of this case, one can see that couples from cross-cultural marriages can benefit from being referred to their church, so they will be enabled to bridge the gap of their differences. Some non-Christian programs for cross-cultural couples may also be available. However, there are no such programs at churches, as far as the author

knows.  It would be a good recommendation for churches to give special attention to couples from cross-cultural marriages. In the case study, the couple was referred to their church because churches can provide important support to the cross-cultural couple. Here are important reasons for therapists to collaborate with churches:

1. Helping the couple to connect around similar religious values, including parenting approaches, creates more cohesiveness in the marriage.

2. The couple is helped to find a group of friends they can have in common.

3. Religion is linked to more satisfying sex (Hackathorn, Ashdown, & Rife, 2016), stronger family ties (Williamson, 2003), more successful children (Fagan, 1995, Mooney, 2005), and better parenting skills (Howarth et al., 2008). Connecting a couple to a religious tradition will strengthen their marriage.

Here are important ways that churches can minister to cross-cultural couples. Churches can help them by:

1. accepting them as part of the Body of Christ. This means sharing Jesus with them and having a common bond with them, which is the bond of salvation that makes all believers unified in one body.   The church will love them, show genuine concern for them, serve their needs, and worship the Lord with them.

2. providing translation of the services when needed, which would help the ones who do not understand the primary language to engage.

3. encouraging other church members to explore and accept the culture of the foreign spouse, which would help them to feel welcomed and accepted in the local culture.

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4. encouraging counselors who work at church to get training in helping and supporting such couples. They can do this by joining courses for therapists in cross-cultural counseling, reading books on the topic, and connecting to other counselors who work with cross-cultural families and learn from their experiences. These counselors should find a supervisor who will coordinate their work with cross-cultural couples.

5. monitoring cross-cultural couples by providing special support that can be given by the church therapist. This would help the couple to deal with their differences, talk about their difficulties, learn communication and problem-solving skills that take in consideration both cultures.

6. building programs for strengthening marriages, including cross-cultural marriages and its unique needs.

7. building a support group. If there is more than one cross-cultural marriage in the church, bring them together or even gather such couples from other churches in the area. The group could meet regularly and share successes and struggles of their experiences. This would be helpful for all the couples in the group by modeling or learning from one another, which would help them to support and be accountable to each other. The leaders of the support groups might be those who have received marriage therapy training. This would provide them a sense of success and also make them accountable to each other and to the group.

8. having spiritual follow-up with cross-cultural couples, which would provide a healthy environment and help them to seek the Lord in prayers and studying

the scriptures.  This would help in their spiritual growth and bring them to the

divine source of help.

In summary, this thesis utilized a case study method to demonstrate the use of an

integrative approach that includes Integrative Biblical therapy, Systems approach,

Structural approach, Cognitive-Behavioral Couple Therapy, Hope-Focused Couple

Therapy, Solution Focused Therapy, Emotional Focused Therapy, Communication

approaches to provide therapeutic services to a cross-cultural couple and demonstrate the

benefits of referring them to their faith community for additional support.

<center>**Appendix 1**</center>

<center>**Intake for Couple Therapy**</center>

Date _____

Husband: Name _____ Age _____ ID No. _____

           Occupation _____

Wife:     Name _____ Age _____ ID No. _____

           Occupation _____

Children: Name _____    M/F   Age _____ ID No. _____

           Name _____    M/F   Age _____ ID No. _____

           Name _____    M/F   Age _____ ID No. _____

Address _____

1. Relationship status: married, engaged or cohabiting? _____

2. Year of marriage _____

3. Who referred you for therapy?
   _____

4. Whose idea was to come to therapy? _____

5. Why now?
   _____
   _____
   _____

6. What are your religious beliefs? _____

7. Do either of you drink alcohol or take drugs?

   _____

8.  Do you perceive that either you or your partner has withdrawn from the marriage? Who?

    _____
    _____

9.  What are your beliefs about divorce?

    Husband_____
    _____
    _____
    _____

    Wife_____
    _____
    _____
    _____

10. Have either of you threatened to separate or divorce as a result of the current marital problems? Who?

    _____
    _____

11. Have either you, or your partner, consulted a lawyer about divorce? Who?

    _____
    _____

12. Have either you or your partner struck, physically restrained, used violence against or injured the other person within the last three years? Specify who, how often and what happened.

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

13. What is your current level of stress? (circle one)

Extremely high - Very high - High – Moderate -  Low - Very Low -  Extremely Law

    Husband _____                    Wife _____

14. Who is most optimistic that therapy will help?

    _____
    _____

15. Relationship history: graph marital satisfaction beginning when you met (add pivotal events) (hand the couple a piece of paper each)

16. Marital satisfaction: Please circle the phrase which best describes the degree of happiness of your relationship

| Extremely unhappy | Fairly unhappy | A little unhappy | Happy | Very Happy | Extremely Happy | Perfect |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

Husband _____

Wife _____

17. I want each of you, in turn, to describe what you think, from your perspective; the major problems are with your marriage.

Husband_____
_____
_____
_____

Wife_____
_____
_____
_____

18. What words or phrases capture the strength of your relationship—its values, flavor, and unique style?

Husband_____
_____
_____
_____

Wife_____
_____
_____
_____

19. What keeps you together?

Husband_____
_____

Wife_____
_____

20. How do you describe each other?

Husband_____
_____
_____
_____

Wife_____
_____
_____
_____

21. If people who know you well were describing you two as a couple, what would they say?

Husband_____
_____
_____
_____

Wife_____
_____
_____
_____

22. How frequently have you had sexual relations during the last month?

_____

23. How enjoyable is your sexual relationship? (terrible, more unpleasant than pleasant, not pleasant and not unpleasant, more pleasant than unpleasant, great)

Husband_____
_____

Wife_____
_____

24. How satisfied are you with the frequency of your sexual relations? (way too often to suit me, a bit too often to suit me, about right, a bit too seldom to suit me, way too seldom to suit me)

Husband_____
_____

Wife_____
_____

25. In what degree do you have family and friends support you as a couple? (circle one)

Extremely high - Very high – High - Moderate - Low - Very Low - Extremely Law

Husband _____                    Wife _____

**Goal Setting**

26. If you woke up tomorrow and your marriage were perfect, what would be different?

Husband_____

_____

Wife_____

_____

27. How will you know the situation is improving?

Husband_____

_____

Wife_____

_____

28. What kinds of change will you settle for? What will need to happen (or not happen) to let you know that, even if you're not out of the woods entirely, you're at least on the right path?

Husband_____

_____

Wife_____

_____

29. What will each of you settle for?

Husband_____

_____

Wife_____

_____

**Family Genogram**

Mark's family- lives in Europe

Rita's family:  lives in Israel
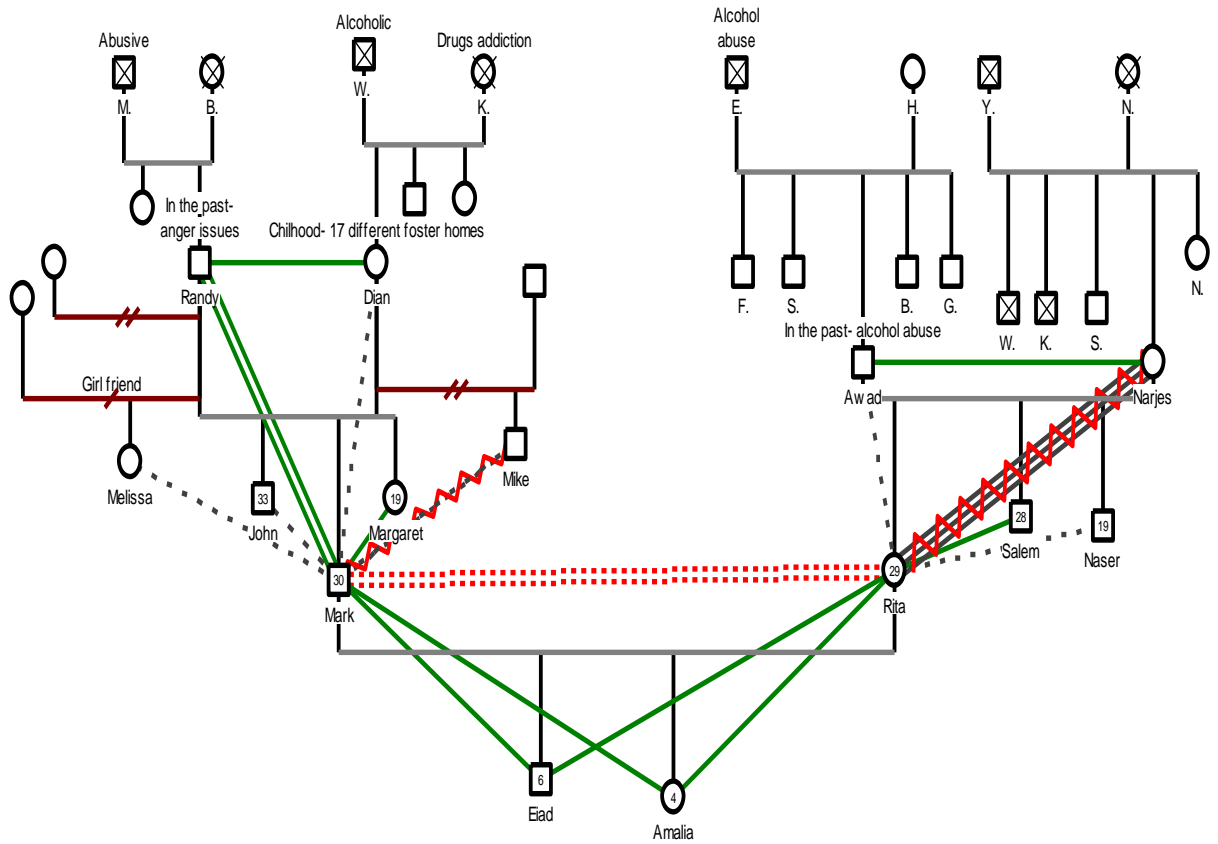


Family lives in Israel

## Genogram Symbols

Male    Female    Death

## Family Relationships

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1 Legal separation

2 Divorce

## Emotional Relationships

6 Distant / Poor

1 Friendship / Close

1 Distant-Hostile

1 Fused-Hostile

1 Discord / Conflict

8 Harmony

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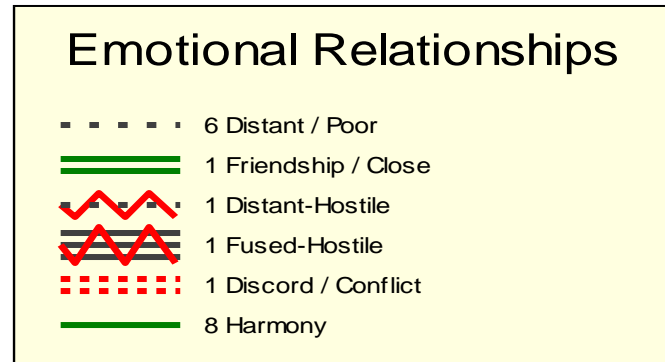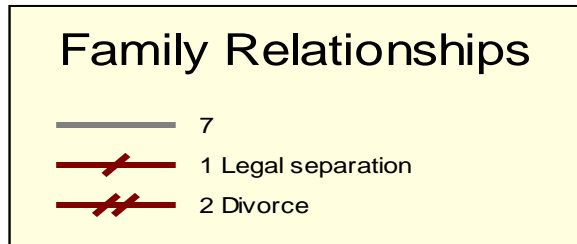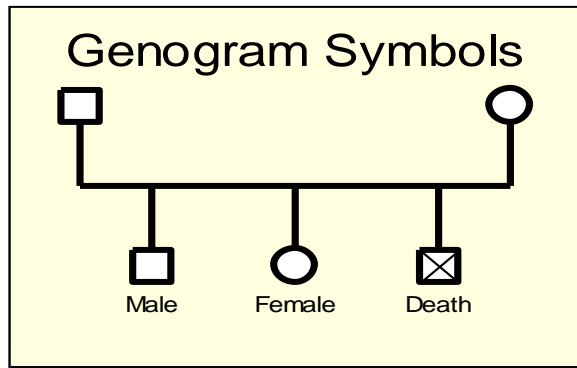
# Appendix 3

## Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships (PAIR)

**Instructions:** In the first phase please respond to each question *as your relationship is now*. In the second phase please respond to each question *as you would like your relationship to be.* Please use the scale below:

| Does not describe me/my | | | | Describes me/my |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| relationship at all | | | | relationship very well |

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

 **1.** My partner listens to me when I need someone to talk to.

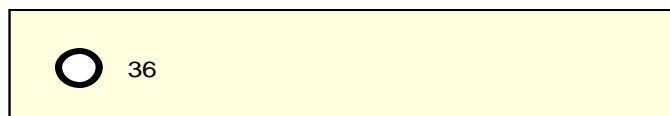**2.** We enjoy spending time with other couples.

**3.** I am satisfied with our sex life.

**4.** My partner helps me clarify my thoughts.

**5.** We enjoy the same recreational activities.

**6.** My partner has all the qualities I've ever wanted in a mate.

**7.** I can state me feelings without him/her getting defensive.

**8.** We usually "keep to ourselves."

**9.** I feel our sexual activity is just routine.

**10.** When it comes to having a serious discussion it seems that we have little in common.

**11.** I share very few of my partners' interests.

**12.** There are times when I do not feel a great deal of love and affection for my partner.

**13.** I often feel distant from my partner.

**14.** We have very few friends in common.

**15.** I am able to tell my partner when I want sexual intercourse.

**16.** I feel "put-down" in a serious conversation with my partner.

**17.** We like playing together.

**18.** Every new thing that I have learned about my partner has pleased me.

**19.** My partner can really understand my hurts and joys.

**20.** Having time together with friends is an important part of our shared activities.

**21.** I "hold back" my sexual interest because my partner makes me feel uncomfortable.

**22.** I feel it is useless to discuss some things with my partner.

**23.** We enjoy the out-of-doors together.

**24.** My partner and I understand each other completely.

**25.** I feel neglected at times by my partner.

**26.** Many of my partner's closest friends are also my closest friends.

**27.** Sexual expression is an essential part of our relationship.

**28.** My partner frequently tries to change my ideas.

**29.** We seldom find time to do fun things together.

**30.** I don't think anyone could possibly be happier than my partner and I when we are with one another.

**31.** I sometimes feel lonely when we're together.

**32.** My partner disapproves of some of my friends.

**33.** My partner seems disinterested in sex.

**34.** We have an endless number of things to talk about.

**35.** I think that we share some of the same interests.

**36.** I have some needs that are not being met by my relationship.

**Appendix 4**

**Areas of Change Questionnaire**

**Instructions**

In every relationship, there are behaviors one or both partners seek to change. Behaviors may occur either too often or not often enough. For example, a partner may be dissatisfied because the other takes out the garbage only once a week. The desired change would be for this behavior to occur more often. On the other hand, one might be dissatisfied because too much time was being spent cleaning up the house; in this case, the desired change would be for this behavior to occur less often. In other words, a person's dissatisfaction with partner performance of a particular behavior can be expressed as a desire for a behavior to occur either more or less often.

The following pages list typical behaviors, which can cause relationship dissatisfactions. As you read each item, decide whether you are satisfied with your partner's performance described in that item. If you are satisfied with your partner's performance or if an item is not relevant to you, check the zero point on the scale, meaning "NO CHANGE DESIRED."

If you are 'not satisfied' with your partner's performance in a particular item, indicate the direction of change in behavior you would like to see. Use the rating scale accompanying each item. If you would prefer to see a particular behavior occur less often, make a check mark (\/) on the "minus" half of the rating scale and

indicate how much less you would like this behavior to occur. If you would prefer to see a particular behavior occur more often, make a check mark on the "plus" half of the rating scale to indicate how much more you would like this behavior to occur. Finally, as you go through the list, please indicate which items you consider to be of major importance in your relationship.

Please note that the scales change direction, so that much less is sometimes on the left, and at other times on the right.

*Parts I and II are combined here; note that different stems are used in Parts I and II.*

Part 1: I want my partner to …

Part 2: I would please my partner if…


Part 1-

1.. .participated in

decisions about      -3    -2    -1      0    **+1**     **+2**    **+3**    [ ]

spending money

|  | much | less | somewhat |  | somewhat | more | much |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | less |  | Less |  | more |  | more |

2. spent time keeping

     **+3**    **+2**    **+1**      0    -1     -2    -3    [ ]

the house clean

|  | much | more | somewhat |  | somewhat | less | much |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | more |  | More |  | less |  | less |

3. ..had meals ready

     **+3**    **+2**    **+1**      0    -1     -2    -3    [ ]

in time

|  | much more | more | somewhat More | | somewhat less | less | much less | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4. ...paid attention to his/her appearance | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 | +3 | [  ] |

|  | much less | more | somewhat Less | | somewhat more | less | much more | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5. .hit him/her | +3 | +2 | +1 | 0 | -1 | -2 | -3 | [  ] |

|  | much more | more | somewhat More | | somewhat less | less | much less | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6. ..got together with his/her friends | +3 | +2 | +1 | 0 | -1 | -2 | -3 | [  ] |

|  | much more | more | somewhat More | | somewhat less | less | much less | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7. ..paid the bills on time | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 | +3 | [  ] |

|  | much less | less | somewhat Less | | somewhat more | more | much more | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8. ..prepared interesting meals | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 | +3 | [  ] |

|  | much less | less | somewhat Less | | somewhat more | more | much more | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

9. ..started interesting
conversations with     +3    +2    +1     0    -1     -2    +3   [   ]
me

        much    more   somewhat     somewhat   less    much

        more         More        less         less

10. ..went out with
me         -3     -2     -1     0    +1     +2    +3   [   ]

        much   less    somewhat     somewhat   more   much

        less        Less        more        more

11. ..showed
appreciation for
things he/she      +3    +2    +1     0    -1      -2     -3   [   ]
does well

        much    more   somewhat     somewhat   less    much

        more        more       less        less

12. ..got together with his/her
relatives        -3     -2     -1     0   +1     +2    +3   [   ]

        much   Less    somewhat    somewhat   more   much

        less        less       more        more

13. had sexual relations with
him/her       +3    +2     +1     0    -1      -2    -3   [   ]

        much   more    somewhat    somewhat   less    much

|  | more |  | more |  | Less |  | less |  |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 14. ..drank | **+3** | **+2** | **+1** | 0 | -1 | -2 | -3 | [  ] |
|  | much | more | somewhat |  | somewhat | less | much |  |
|  | more |  | more |  | Less |  | less |  |
| 15. worked late... | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | **+1** | **+2** | **+3** | [  ] |
|  | much | Less | somewhat |  | somewhat | more | much |  |
|  | less |  | less |  | more |  | more |  |

Part 2:

|  | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 16. ..got together with our friends | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | **+1** | **+2** | **+3** | [  ] |
|  | much | less | Somewhat |  | somewhat | more | much |  |
|  | less |  | Less |  | More |  | more |  |
| 17. ..helped with housework when asked | **-3** | -2 | -1 | 0 | **+1** | **+2** | **+3** | [  ] |
|  | much | less | somewhat |  | somewhat | more | much |  |
|  | less |  | less |  | More |  | more |  |
| 18. ...argued with me | **+3** | **+2** | **+1** | 0 | -1 | -2 | -3 | [  ] |
|  | much | more | Somewhat |  | somewhat | less | much |  |
|  | more |  | More |  | Less |  | less |  |

| 19. ...disciplined children | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 | +3 | [  ] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | much less | more | Somewhat Less | | somewhat More | more | much more | |

| 20. ...engaged in extra-marital sexual relationships | +3 | +2 | +1 | 0 | -1 | -2 | -3 | [  ] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | much more | more | Somewhat More | | somewhat Less | less | much less | |

| 21. ...spent time in outside activities | +3 | +2 | +1 | 0 | -1 | -2 | -3 | [  ] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | much more | more | Somewhat More | | somewhat Less | less | much less | |

| 22. ...paid attention to my sexual needs | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 | +3 | [  ] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | much less | less | Somewhat Less | | somewhat More | more | much more | |

| 23. ...spent time with children | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 | +3 | [  ] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | much less | less | Somewhat Less | | somewhat More | more | much more | |

24...gave him/her
attention when he/she    **+3**    **+2**    **+1**    0    -1    -2    +3    [  ]
needs it

|  | much | more | somewhat |  | somewhat | less | much |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | more |  | More |  | Less |  | less |

25.  assumed
responsibility for    -3    -2    -1    0    **+1**    **+2**    **+3**    [  ]
finances

|  | much | less | Somewhat |  | somewhat | more | much |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | less |  | Less |  | More |  | more |

26. ..left him/her to
himself/herself    **+3**    **+2**    **+1**    0    -1    -2    -3    [  ]

|  | much | more | Somewhat |  | somewhat | less | much |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | more |  | more |  | Less |  | less |

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## Profile

I am Christine Dakwar.  I was born in Israel on May 25, 1969.  I am married and a mother of three grown children.  My husband and I are the pastors of the New Covenant Church in Haifa, Israel.

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Gordon-Conwell Seminary, South Hamilton, MA — D. Min in Marriage and Family Counseling, 2017.  I enrolled in the D. Min program in 2013 and expect to graduate in May 2017.

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## Professional development

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